

**R15P00**

**Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission**

**Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget**

**Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

**MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**

**Appropriations Committee**

**Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**

**Delegate Stephanie M. Smith, Chair**

**February 4, 2026**

**and**

**MARYLAND SENATE**

**Budget and Taxation Committee**

**Education, Business and Administration Subcommittee**

**Senator Nancy J. King, Chair**

**February 5, 2026**



## **SUMMARY**

*Your committee is considering an FY27 Executive Budget that recognizes Maryland Public Television's role in serving Marylanders and our job to serve statewide, comprehensively, and responsibly.*

*We offer in this testimony a snapshot of our service to the Free State during FY25 and the early months of FY26. As you turn your attention to the investment Maryland will make in MPT in FY27, we express sincere thanks for your support of our work.*

### **The highlights of the year**

- **The national premiere in primetime on PBS of a Maryland Public Television-produced documentary about Baltimore native and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.** Titled *Becoming Thurgood: America's Social Architect*, the one-hour film premiered on 9/9/25 to great acclaim. Between that date and the first week of November 2025, *Becoming Thurgood* had nearly 2,000 airings on public TV stations across the nation (185 markets and 300 channels). It had also been streamed more than 29,000 times through the end of November. Most impressive, from 9/9/25 to 11/17/25, the film garnered 1.26 million impressions.

Like its national production predecessors, *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom* and *Becoming Frederick Douglass*, the Thurgood Marshall documentary came to life under the aegis of MPT's Center for Maryland History Films, a three-year-old initiative supported in part by a State of Maryland appropriation.

- **The initial year of programming and activities associated with MPT's Maryland Center for Media Literacy & Education.** The Center launched with a livestreamed event in November 2024, featuring remarks by First Lady Dawn Moore about essential media literacy skills and the necessity for awareness of children's digital media use.

Center staff created resources and training materials and made them available through an online resource hub featuring top-shelf media literacy tutorials, articles, and timely research. Its new website, [marylandmedialiteracy.org](http://marylandmedialiteracy.org), offers materials to help citizens of all ages learn about healthy media habits. Center staff are conducting outreach programs for early childhood learners and creating K-12 resources for students, parents, and educators. Working with libraries, Judy Centers, community colleges, and senior centers, MPT delivered more than 20 workshops, reaching more than 400 educators, students, families, and seniors across the state. Another 350+ education professionals witnessed Center presentations at various health and wellness and civics programs. All this represents only the start of the Center's work to help Marylanders approach digital media in healthy, positive ways.

**MPT, in partnership with WBAL-TV, presented in March 2025 the premiere of *Key Bridge Disaster: Reflect, Recover, Rebuild*.** As residents of Maryland prepared to mark the first anniversary of the Francis Scott Key Bridge disaster, this one-hour film took an in-depth look at what happened when the container ship Dali lost power and collided with the bridge, resulting in its collapse and the tragic loss of six lives. The documentary then examined the salvage operation, looked at the human and economic impacts of the disaster, and covered the funding and design of a new bridge for the 21st century to help energize Baltimore's and the region's economic future. The experiences and insights of more than 20 individuals are part of the film – still available for viewing – including interviews with Maryland Governor Wes Moore and Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott conducted by MPT anchor Jeff Salkin and WBAL-TV news anchor and reporter Deborah Weiner.

The two Maryland TV stations collaborated over nine months to produce the documentary, which used news reports, interviews, and the video resources of both organizations, together with additional graphics and footage, and new interviews.

- **The premiere in May of the MPT film *Maryland by Air*, narrated by legendary Marylander Cal Ripken Jr.** Filmed entirely by air over a period of a year, the one-hour documentary (still available for viewing) enables viewers to experience the wonders of the Free State from its western hills to its metro areas to its shorelines and farmlands. In addition to numerous MPT

broadcasts and streaming during 2025, *Maryland by Air* will be enjoyed for the next 10 years by visitors to the Maryland Science Center's IMAX theater.

- **Coverage of Maryland legislature and executive branch events.** In FY25 a U.S. senatorial debate, the governor's State of the State address, and hundreds of hours of streaming coverage of Maryland General Assembly floor sessions in Annapolis were part of MPT's public affairs service for citizens statewide.

Where the 447<sup>th</sup> legislative session was concerned, MPT staff were on hand for the fourth year for gavel-to-gavel House coverage and for the third year of Senate chamber streaming for the full 90 days in partnership with the Maryland Department of Legislative Services. MPT provided technical production services that enable DLS to stream live coverage of Maryland Senate and House of Delegates floor proceedings. Four MPT staffers – two in the House chambers and two in the Senate chambers – were on site at the Maryland State House each day of the session. This work continues in 2026.

Of course, in addition to MPT's technical production work in Annapolis, the network's weekly program *State Circle* began its 44th season in FY25. Led by anchor Jeff Salkin, the long-running series will continue in 2026 to provide in-depth reporting on the legislative session through its *sine die* conclusion.

- **MPT celebrated historically Black colleges and universities in September during its sixth annual HBCU Week**, featuring a slate of programs sharing informative and inspiring stories about HBCUs and the people who attend, graduate, administrate, and advocate for these important institutions of higher learning. MPT presented 32 hours of content – including 12 MPT program premieres – across TV, social media, and online platforms. This included stories from the HBCUs in MPT's viewing area, including Bowie State University, Coppin State University, Morgan State University, and University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

## Noteworthy service for Maryland citizens and those beyond the Free State

**MPT celebrated the Chesapeake Bay region in April 2025 with its 21<sup>th</sup> annual Chesapeake Bay Week®**, featuring a slate of documentaries and specials highlighting the beauty, importance, and fragility of the nation's largest estuary. This is a unique and comprehensive programming initiative only public television can mount and is part of the statewide public TV network's ongoing commitment to celebrating the bay and examining critical issues faced by communities throughout the Chesapeake region.

The 2025 program schedule included the MPT production *Resurrecting Poplar Island* as well as 17 additional hours of other bay-focused programs.

**The continuing expansion of MPT's HBCU Week** into a national public media partnership called HBCU Week NOW. Thanks to MPT's efforts, this platform is now the premier destination for in-depth coverage of Maryland's and the nation's 103 HBCUs, showcasing the achievements, stories, and contributions of students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The initiative's YouTube channel has garnered more than 14,000 subscribers and has accumulated more than 3.9 million views since August 2023. Visitors consume and share long- and short-form content about educational excellence and the unique culture of HBCUs. Videos are posted in the fall and throughout the school year, bolstered by regular social media stories.

**Maryland sports** took center stage through MPT's coverage of the four-day MARS Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill in Cecil County in October 2025. The MPT Sports Desk was on the air with the city-based Maryland Cycling Classic in September and the CIAA basketball tourney in February 2025.

**Where MPT series** are concerned, MPT's national weekly series *MotorWeek* marked a remarkable 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary – a rare milestone for any TV series – while mainstays *Outdoors Maryland* and *Maryland Farm & Harvest* launched their 36th and 12<sup>th</sup> seasons, respectively, during FY25. *Chesapeake Collectibles* returned for its 12th season with its June 2025 debut.

**Non-broadcast service.** Not all service to Marylanders involves what's on a TV screen or mobile device. In FY25, MPT conducted 84 separate in-person and online special events. These activities attracted 11,472 individuals in person while another 4,480 participated online or watched the event later on demand. Similarly, the network's Member & Viewer Services team met the information and resource needs of more than 10,000 members/viewers and answered more than 8,000 phone calls during the year.

<b>And in conclusion ...</b>
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MPT is grateful to its single-largest annual donor – the State of Maryland and its citizens – for the support of our state-licensed public broadcasting network. The men and women who toil in the Maryland Senate and House of Delegates review and approve our annual appropriation, and we are always grateful for the opportunity to report on our service through the budget hearings to which we are invited.

We concur with the analyst's recommendations for Maryland Public Television's FY27 budget.

**Steven J. Schupak**  
**President & Chief Executive Officer**

**Chuck Roberts**  
**Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer**

**Patricia Fitzhugh**  
**Vice President & Chief Financial Officer**

**February 2026**