

By John Fritze, The Baltimore Sun

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Maryland officials are working behind the scenes to lure the [FBI](#) 's headquarters to the state from its longtime home base in downtown Washington as the agency seeks an updated building to carry out its expanded counterterrorism and cyber crime missions.

If successful, the effort would land nearly 12,000 jobs and a 2.1 million square-foot office complex in [Prince George's County](#) , making it one of the largest economic development coups in years. Its impact would rival the immense footprint in the state of the Social Security Administration, which has its headquarters in Woodlawn.

The effort has been almost as covert as the agency itself but became more public recently when Sen. [Ben Cardin](#) steered a resolution through the [Senate](#) 's Environment and Public Works Committee this month that sets broad parameters for the location — an early step in the process.

Officials in Virginia and Washington also are likely to compete for the new headquarters, which the agency estimates would cost \$1.2 billion. A new office complex — wherever it is located — would not be completed until 2020 at the earliest, but Cardin said site selection could begin as soon as next year.

"I'm very bullish on this being located in Maryland," said Cardin, a Democrat. "Maryland is well-situated."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has struggled for years with its 37-year-old headquarters, the J. Edgar Hoover Building. Its crumbling concrete façade was found to be a risk to pedestrians. Its basement is prone to flooding. A 2009 study found the building needs \$80.5 million in repairs and upgrades.

A more pressing problem, agency officials have said, is that the FBI's burgeoning workforce is scattered over 22 annex buildings throughout the Washington region. That can present security challenges in dealing with sensitive information, a Nov. 8 Government Accountability Office audit found.

"The FBI is working very hard because they believe, from a security standpoint, it is necessary," [Rep. Steny Hoyer](#) , a Southern Maryland Democrat and House Minority Whip, said

of the agency's efforts to find a new home. For Maryland, Hoyer said, the project would be a "tremendous economic benefit" at a time when "jobs are very important."

Indeed, the number of employees associated with a new FBI headquarters — which officials estimate at 11,600 — would be similar to other large federal agencies in Maryland. The [Food and Drug Administration](#), which is based in Silver Spring, has nearly 11,000 workers in the state, according to the Office of Personnel Management. The Social Security Administration employs nearly 13,000 in Maryland.

Prince George's County officials are gearing up to pitch the state to the agency by identifying properties that would meet its requirements. On the federal level, Cardin said he has had conversations with officials at the General Services Administration, which oversees federal buildings.

"It's an outstanding opportunity," said Jayson Knott, deputy director of Maryland's [Department of Business and Economic Development](#), which also is involved in the effort.

The precise timeline is unclear, but Knott and other officials said approval of the congressional resolution would lead to a solicitation to developers as soon as next year. Knott said he expects site selection would take place as part of that competitive process. The resolution also must be approved by the [House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee](#).

Knott would not say which Maryland properties are in play, but the resolution requires the facility to be located within two miles of a Metro station and within two-and-half miles of the Washington Beltway. That offers many possibilities, such as in Suitland, where the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) is based, or Greenbelt.

Discussion of a new FBI headquarters comes as the General Services Administration is working to steer large-scale federal agency developments to Metro stations around Washington. In those cases, the Metro transit agency would lease land it owns near stations to the federal government.

Adam Elkington, a General Services Administration spokesman, declined to discuss the project. A spokeswoman for the FBI referred The Baltimore Sun to a June 11 letter signed by T.J. Harrington, an associate deputy director. The letter described a new headquarters as "urgently needed," but it did not address the site selection process.

Talk of potential sites in Virginia may focus on [Loudoun County](#), where Metro is building a new rail line to Dulles International Airport. Steve Hargan, an economic development official for Loudoun County, said leaders there would be "very interested in pursuing that opportunity," though he said he believes the decision is "still a long way off."

In Maryland, Prince George's County officials said they would make a strong case because of

the amount of undeveloped, federally owned property available there. They also argue that the county is long overdue for such a project.

The county lost its bid to lure about 3,000 Department of Health and Human Services workers away from neighboring [Montgomery County](#) earlier this year.

David Iannucci, an economic development aide to County Executive [Rushern L. Baker III](#), said that 25 percent of the region's federal employees live in Prince George's County but that it is home to only 4 percent of the federal government's office space. That means many Marylanders are commuting to federal jobs, adding to already clogged highways, he said.

"If you look around the Beltway, you'll find that there are not many 55-acre sites," Iannucci said, referring to the lot size cited in the congressional resolution. "We are essentially the last guy standing when it comes to having large acreages at a Metro station."

But the broader question may be whether a fiscally conservative Congress would pay for such a project, particularly given recent scrutiny of the size of the federal government. Supporters of a new headquarters say some of those concerns may be alleviated by a provision in the resolution that requires a private developer to build the headquarters and lease it back to the government. That could minimize upfront costs.

The FBI estimates that with a new headquarters, it could cut nearly \$60 million from its budget annually that it spends on existing annexes. In addition, Cardin said that development rights for those annexes could be sold to help pay for the headquarters. With those efforts combined, Cardin said he believes the project could be funded within the current budget.

"There's creative thinking that can help get this project moving," he said. "We think what they need, Maryland is well-suited to deliver."