

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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February 20, 2021

Dear Fellow Marylander:

I miss baseball.

I know that the Orioles have not been very good lately, but they are still my hometown team and I will root for them in good times and bad.

Let me rephrase my first sentence. I miss *experiencing* baseball.

As the Orioles' pitchers and catchers reported to Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota this week, I realized how much I miss being in the stands and feeling the rush of every pitch and the thrill of double plays. Watching baseball on television can be fun, but being there in person with friends and family brings with it an electricity that is unmatched.

For me, like many other baseball fans, 2020 was an awkward mix of long-distance cheering and wistful remembrances of "normal" times.

At the start of 2021, Major League Baseball (MLB) announced that it will allow teams to host fans again with a 25 percent capacity limit based on local conditions and public safety regulations. As it has been described, [pods of ticket holders](#) will need to stay six feet apart from other pods. That limits the chances of having a random person accidentally knock into you with their beer or hot dog, so there is some additional benefit.

We are in this place because of COVID-19, which has had a grip on the U.S. for a year now. [Almost 28 million people in this country](#) have tested positive and nearly 500,000 have lost their life to the virus and the disease that it triggers. More than 7,600 Marylanders are among those who have died. From coast-to-coast, tens of millions have lost their jobs and too many are on the verge of losing their homes or not knowing if they will be able to put food on the table for their family in the middle of winter. This is our current normal.

On April 8, when the Orioles take to the field against the Boston Red Sox, I would love to be at Camden Yards. In reality, I am doubtful that I will be ready for such a large crowd, even at [25 percent capacity](#). If you are considering it, I would recommend that you assess your own personal risk and talk to your doctor.

To date, only about [11 percent of Americans](#) have been vaccinated against COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In Maryland, if you are a healthcare provider or nursing home staff, a first responder or law enforcement, live in an assisted living facility, K-12 teacher or education staff, in food production, mass transit or work in a grocery store, or are over age 65, you are eligible to receive a vaccine at this time. [Please see here for a complete list of current eligibility](#).

Demand for vaccines far exceeds supplies at this time. The process has been exceedingly frustrating for most Marylanders. Thankfully, the Biden administration has procured [more doses](#) and is steadily increasing shipments to states, including Maryland.

I expect we will make significant progress in the next month but it is likely we will still need more time before reaching what might be considered “[herd immunity](#)” and the number of vaccinated adults outnumbers the non-vaccinated. Think of it as if the O’s have taken the lead, but it’s still only the fourth or fifth inning. Momentum is on our side but there is still lots of ball to be played – and it could go either way.

Over the last year, I’ve urged caution as our community and our country tried to navigate this pandemic. We can’t get ahead of ourselves and declare the win prematurely. It’s that kind of overconfidence that stretched out our first wave of infections into extra innings.

Getting as many people vaccinated as possible will be a game changer in this battle against COVID-19. But [immunization alone will not end this pandemic and public health crisis](#). The virus is still in our communities. We must continue to wear masks around people not in our households, practice frequent hand washing and keep adequate physical distancing.

I don’t expect to see Chance Sisco take off his catcher’s gear in the eighth or ninth inning just because the Orioles are ahead. So let’s keep up good public health practices as long as necessary – for ourselves, for our family and for our community.

For the love of baseball, get vaccinated when it is your turn and wear a mask, even after you have gotten your shots. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben".

Ben Cardin