

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Friends,

We are not out of the woods yet. More than a month into the statewide shutdown, which was intended to slow the spread of COVID-19, we are seeing some positive signs, but we are not yet where we should be to return to “business as usual.”

This lockdown, though critical for the health of our community, has been tough to endure. Almost 30,000 Marylanders have been infected with COVID-19 and more than 1,400 have died as a result. Thousands of businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations have shuttered their doors and nearly half a million Marylanders have filed for unemployment over the last six weeks alone.

It is no surprise that many of you are eager to get back to some sense of normalcy in your work, school, and home life. Job loss and food insecurity can be overwhelming. Social distancing is hard. Family and friends are being kept apart. Students are losing valuable time in school. However, as several states around the country begin to reopen, and Governor Hogan gives the green light to limited outdoor activities, I urge Marylanders to go slow and stay safe. Let’s take our time, keep up precautions, and proceed in the safest ways possible so that we don’t all wind up back doing work- or school-related Zoom calls from our kitchens in the fall.

On our path to eradicating COVID-19, we need to flatten the curve of infections. We are anxiously looking for 14 straight days of declining fatalities and serious hospitalizations tied to COVID-19. Between May 1 and May 5, Maryland saw four straight days where new COVID-19 cases declined. Unfortunately, the next day, officials confirmed a spike of 1,211 new cases of the coronavirus, the state’s second largest single-day increase in infections, according to the Baltimore Sun. By Friday, we saw slight drops in hospitalizations and patients needing intensive care. This mixed bag of news indicates that the steps we have taken to control the spread of the virus – including prohibiting large gatherings, wearing facemasks while in public, closing schools and non-essential businesses – are working but they need a little more vigilance and a little more time. The last thing we should do is totally abandon those policies just as they are starting to produce the outcomes we desired.

We need to proceed with caution. Maryland does not want to follow the path of some states

that reopened their economies only to experience their highest fatality rates yet. Marylanders have been smart and resilient during this period and I believe we are taking positive steps in the right direction. We need to keep it up.

During moments when I'm feeling especially frustrated by the way that this pandemic has upended daily life for my loved ones and the community as a whole, I try to remember that the adaptations we make aren't just to protect ourselves; they are to protect all of those around us. Our choices are even more important when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable, including the elderly, communities of color, and individuals with chronic health conditions who face a substantially higher risk of becoming gravely ill and dying from the coronavirus. Any decision you and I make regarding lifting -- or ignoring -- social distancing measures needs to take into consideration the catastrophic impact it could have on our family, our neighbors, our friends, and others who could be put in a life-threatening position.

In the meantime, I continue to work with my congressional colleagues to provide relief for our nation's families, businesses, and communities. More support is needed urgently, but, thus far, we have been cooperating to build small business economic relief programs, expand unemployment insurance, and strengthen social safety nets like Medicaid and food assistance programs.

I am also fighting to ensure that so long as the Senate is back in session, we are doing the business that is urgently required to ease the burden of this pandemic on the American people. In addition to getting more funds to support our local jurisdictions and state governments, our current priorities are to increase oversight and transparency to ensure the programs we have created are reaching the intended beneficiaries. I am also continuing to pressure the administration to develop a comprehensive testing strategy so that we can safely reopen the national economy as soon as possible.

Just like you, I can't wait for the day when Maryland, and the entire country, goes back to normal. Normal may look a little different whenever it happens, but I look forward to seeing shops open their doors, office buildings and construction sites bustling, and students back at school. But if we remove crucial health protections too early, that future will be jeopardized.

My first priority, and the priority that I believe must drive every decision in response to this health crisis, is protecting our safety. In doing so, we guarantee a brighter future not only next week or next month, but for many years to come.

Lastly, I'd just like to thank each of you for the sacrifices you've made for the sake of our community's collective wellbeing. These times are hard, but I have seen the strength and generosity of Marylanders, and I know we can get through this together.

Happy Mother's Day to all the Maryland moms.

Please, everyone stay safe.



Ben Cardin

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