

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Friend,

We are still in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to run rampant across our nation, especially in the Midwestern, Southern and Sunbelt states. Nearly [4.9 million Americans have tested positive](#) for the virus, and the death toll has surpassed 160,000. Maryland, which is seeing our positivity rate head in the right direction, has been fluctuating of late.

While there are [steps we could have taken previously](#) to mitigate the community spread, we must deal with the situation that faces us today. To help get us through this and finally flatten that curve for good, we should all follow the simple guidance of medical researchers and public health professionals. Basic steps like [washing your hands](#), using a face covering and keeping six feet apart are commonsense measures based on scientific knowledge and not political statements.

In what we used to call “normal times” and during public crises, we rightly would rely on subject-matter experts to issue warnings and guidance on dangerous weather, the environment, threats to clean and safe drinking water, security concerns and so much more, including highly contagious infectious diseases.

There is still much we do not know about COVID-19. Medical scientists continue to study it and learn from patients across the U.S. and globally. What we do know is that it can be deadly for some, while

an inconvenience for others. Many “[long haulers](#)” who may have had relatively light symptoms at first have had lingering health issues weeks and months later.

The growing library of scientific knowledge and the expertise of immunologists and other medical professionals should be the driving force in decisions about public health and public safety. Public health and science should not be politicized, but it has been lately, creating differing understandings of the seriousness of the threat now facing our local communities and our country as a whole.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that we are where we are today. President Donald Trump and his administration have a long history of muzzling or marginalizing legitimate scientific research and data. The president has refused to acknowledge the increasing dangers of climate change and has done all he can to [abolish](#) foundational environmental protections, which ultimately puts future generations at risk.

In 2018, President Trump [disbanded](#) and withdrew funding for the National Security Council’s directorate that was established to prepare the nation for future pandemics. He continues to profess that the only reason the U.S. has so many people infected with COVID-19 is because we have done more tests. He also withdrew the United States’ presence and participation in the [World Health Organization](#) ... in the middle of a global pandemic.

The president has repeatedly promoted pseudoscience and made false claims on drug treatments. It took him months to wear a face mask at all.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, our nation’s top infectious disease expert at the Bethesda-based National Institutes of Health, who has led six administrations through several public health emergencies such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, H1N1 and Ebola, has taken this COVID-19 pandemic head on. Yet he, and Dr. Deborah Birx, who heads the White House Task Force on the Coronavirus, recently have been lambasted by the president for providing straightforward medical assessments and recommendations. The fissure between President Trump, and his supporters, and medical experts has grown so severe that Dr. Fauci has been forced to hire security to protect his family from threats.

Silencing the experts and ignoring or dismissing the pandemic will not make it simply “[go away](#).” If we are to get through this, we must allow

medical professionals to take the lead in our public health decision making. It's going to take hard work – hard work that is being done at the state and community level without sufficient financial backing and national coordination so desperately needed during a national emergency.

These are the times a federal government is essential. Congress and the president must provide the resources needed to support our most vulnerable people and keep our communities afloat. We must provide the financial backstop for individuals in need, small businesses, state and local governments, and the economy generally.

On Thursday, I participated in an incredibly [timely discussion on Facebook and YouTube](#) with Dr. Stephen Thomas of the University of Maryland Center for Health Equity and Dr. Leana Wen of The George Washington University about how we can address health inequities in our response to COVID-19. Current analysis makes it clear that this pandemic has taken a disproportionate toll on communities of color. Our national and state-level responses must acknowledge that disparity.

In our discussion, Dr. Wen summed things up succinctly by saying: “We are all in this together. This disease knows no boundaries.” So let's all work together, following the best available science.

I ask that we all continue to listen carefully to our public health experts as we continue to brave through this global health crisis. Please look out for one another. As Dr. Thomas said: “Wear a mask. Have patience. Treat people with dignity and respect.”

Stay safe and healthy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The signature is stylized with a large, looping 'B' and a cursive 'en'.

Ben