

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



www.cardin.senate.gov



[@SenatorCardin](https://twitter.com/SenatorCardin)



[SenatorBenCardin](https://www.facebook.com/SenatorBenCardin)



[@senatorcardin](https://www.instagram.com/senatorcardin)

March 6, 2021

Dear Fellow Marylander:

Throughout March we celebrate Women's History Month. It is a time to look back on the incredible contributions that women have made to American society and a time to recognize all of the barriers women have overcome in their daily lives and at exceptional times.

We currently live in such exceptional times. As we surpass the one-year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic, I want to salute the women who have carried the weight of our nation on their shoulders.

In the United States, one in three jobs held by women last year was designated as "essential," according to a [New York Times analysis](#). The same analysis found that 52% of the 48.7 million essential workers are women, including 77% of the 19 million health care workers and 78% of the 2.3 million social workers. In the health care arena, the Times finds that "women make up nearly nine out of 10 nursing and nursing assistants, most respiratory therapists, a majority of pharmacists and an overwhelming majority of pharmacy aides and technicians."

It is tragically unsurprising that a corresponding percentage of health care workers who suffered from COVID-19 last year were women. [An April 2020 report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that women account for 73% of the U.S. health care workers who have been infected since the outbreak began. That number rose to 79% in a [revised report in September](#).

Women have always had a dominant presence in essential workforce industries, including the home health and food service industry. Today, home health and personal care aides, two of the fastest growing occupations in the U.S., with an average hourly wage of \$12.71, are female-dominated industries. In fact, 80% of the more-than 3 million aides are women. More than half of these workers are women of color.

Over the last year, were you still able to get groceries for your family? You can thank the millions of grocery and fast-food workers – [two-thirds of whom are women](#). Without women in these industries, our elderly and disabled family and friends in home and community settings would be without care, and our collective ability to obtain even basic food for meals would be drastically diminished.

While our country struggled at the onset of the pandemic last spring, women sprung to action to ensure our health and safety through the production of cloth masks. With companies pivoting to manufacture cloth masks to fight the pandemic, [the workers doing the sewing are typically Asian American and Latina immigrant women](#). These women take great risks to create tools to ensure our safety, while typically earning a small income given the historic low-wage pay for garment work in the U.S.

This year, I was proud to watch my friend and former colleague Kamala Harris sworn in as Vice President of the United States. It was a long overdue milestone for our nation – electing the first woman, the first Black woman, the first South Asian woman to the second-highest elected position in our government. As we witnessed that glass ceiling shattered, we also must shine a light on the reality that most women in our country, especially women of color, do not earn the same pay as men doing the same work.

Nationwide, women are paid just 80 cents to the dollar compared to men doing the same work. In Maryland, the gap is slightly better at [85 cents](#), but for the service industries that have been keeping our state afloat in the worst of times, it translates into more than a \$10,000 gap in median income. According to a study by the [Economic Policy Institute](#), “Black women in Maryland earned \$22,054 less and Latina women earned \$37,971 less” than white men doing the same work.

The burdens and expectations placed on women pre-pandemic were great, along with the need to balance work and family obligations in a way that stereotypically was not required for men. During the pandemic, the financial pressures and sudden changes in schooling and work options brought those challenges to the forefront. Those mothers who were able to work full-time from home most often were (are) responsible for caring for their children, guiding them through online instructions and completing their own work, usually simultaneously.

For many women, especially single-moms and low-income families, balance became an impossibility. According to statistics compiled by the Center for American Progress, “women have lost a net of [5.4 million jobs](#) during the COVID-induced recession -- nearly 1 million more job losses than men.” This last December, [most of the net job losses for that month](#) were Black, Latina and Asian women.

The American Rescue Plan, the latest COVID-relief package working through Congress, will bring much-needed support to the essential women who have been holding our nation together during this crisis. There is help for men, as well.

On the health care front, at last reading, the bill provides \$7.5 billion for vaccines, distribution, supplies and related programs, including funding for mobile vaccination units and support for health departments. There is \$46 billion for COVID-19 testing, tracing and personal protective equipment (PPE). Among other related funding, there also is more than \$15 billion to for rural providers, sustaining a public health workforce, preventing infections in skilled nursing facilities and more.

If we cannot control the COVID-19 virus, we cannot adequately solve the economic and social crises also hurting our nation, especially America’s women.

For those supporting their families despite low wages, the American Rescue Plan provides an additional \$1,400 in relief for families and increases the Child Tax Credit to \$3,000 for most families – it’s higher for younger children. There also is \$40 billion for childcare programs, particularly for essential workers, helping to lower out-of-pocket costs at a time when resources are stretched thin and ensure child care providers have the resources to stay in operation. The package extends SNAP benefit increases and increases the value of WIC vouchers for fruits and vegetables. It also expands the use of SNAP benefits online for those juggling too many errands without enough time or want to limit exposure in crowded stores.

For those millions, who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic, the American Rescue Plan extends emergency unemployment insurance programs. This includes the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for self-employed workers, gig workers, and others in non-traditional employment and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program for workers who have exhausted their state benefits. It also extends the length of time individuals can receive these pandemic-related benefits by an additional 24 weeks. It also includes more than \$30 billion in emergency rental assistance to help both renters and small landlords, as well as \$10 billion in aid to homeowners who have fallen behind on mortgage payments, utility bills and other housing costs.

I can keep going for pages and pages, but this is a sampling of what really is in the American Rescue Plan. There is so much more in this bill that is targeted at making our nation and our families whole again during a once-in-a-century public health crisis. Rural or urban, farmer or family, small business or local community. Emergencies like this are when government can best bring together the resources that will make a positive difference in people's lives.

During this Women's History Month, I am proud that the Congress will be delivering relief for the American people, especially the women, who have kept this nation afloat during the most difficult of times.

Please join me in thanking the essential women in your life, from the health care aides and grocery workers to medical researchers and educators, to family members near and far. Despite the obstacles and risks, women have been among the greatest heroes of this pandemic

Thank you.

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

Ben Cardin

Was this email forwarded to you? [Click here to subscribe](#)
To be removed from this mailing list, please click [unsubscribe](#)