

# U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Friend,

*“We must keep the faith, keep our eyes on the prize. We must go out and vote like we never ever voted before. Some people gave more than a little blood. Some gave their very lives.” – Rep. John Lewis*

During a 2015 commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday, [John Lewis said](#) he believed that fateful day, March 7, 1965, would be his last. A passionate 25-year-old leading the march from Montgomery to Selma, Alabama, Lewis was brutally beaten by the police alongside hundreds of other demonstrators for daring to demand their constitutional right to vote as they crossed the Edmond Pettus Bridge.

He survived his nearly fatal wounds and lived to spend the rest of his days carrying the torch for this movement; a movement that would change this country forever – that changed it for the better. Just months after the march was broadcasted for the nation to see, the Voting Rights Act was

signed into law. Voting registration and participation among Black residents in the South **increased dramatically** after the passage of the bill, marking a historic victory in the civil rights movement.

John Lewis lived to see 80-years-old as an accomplished legislator – countless fellow activists who marched before and with him did not. He honored them and their sacrifices fiercely by seeing through the fight for racial equality and against injustice in Congress over three decades – and he wasn't done yet. To honor him, we must fight just as hard.

Because of his work and the movement he was a part of, the values of our nation rang more true for all. To fulfill his legacy is to exercise our right to vote and to fight to preserve and expand it for all.

In 2020, this mission is especially urgent. We're heading into a general election marked with great challenges – old obstacles rearing their head in new ways and new ones brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The erosion of the Voting Rights Act in the 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision opened the floodgates for new strategies for many states to continue to suppress voting power of its citizens, especially communities of color. Familiar tactics such as mass purges of voter rolls, voter ID laws, and felony disenfranchisement layered with the proliferation of misinformation and fear tactics turn back the clock on decades worth of progress harken back to the days when poll taxes and literacy tests turned away Black voters at the polls.

The COVID-19 outbreak further obstructs the road to the ballot box and threatens the exploitation of those obstructive policies.

No one should have to choose between protecting themselves from COVID-19 and fulfilling their civic duty. It is more

important than ever before that we prepare to conduct elections to be as safe and efficient as possible – our democracy and lives depend on it.

Earlier in the year, the first primaries in states like [Wisconsin](#) made headlines as they grappled with long lines without social distance or sanitation precautions, ill-prepared for the budding pandemic. Maryland's mail-in primary offered glimpses of the possibilities of a safe and distant election and resulted in an increase in registration and participation.

Improving on a hybrid system of mail-in and in-person voting for the general election is clearly the safest option as rates of COVID-19 cases continue to rise in our state and nation. That's why my congressional colleagues and I were alarmed at Governor Larry Hogan's decision to reopen all polling locations in Maryland for the general elections without the resources to do so safely. We [urged him to reconsider his decision for a traditional in-person election](#), which will add unnecessary obstacles for those who would want to vote by mail for their personal safety and the health of those around them.

Elections with primarily in-person voting en masse puts our residents and poll workers at greater risk for COVID-19 infection and spread, and contradicts current public health recommendations. [CDC guidance](#) rightfully calls for alternatives to in-person voting and advises rigorous sanitization protocols and the use of face masks by voters and poll workers alike at any physical voting location. But without sufficient access to PPE and adequate disinfectant supplies to follow through on these recommendations, in-person polling locations could become hotpots for the spread of this disease. Such concern is why the Board of Elections reports a [deficit of close to 14,000 poll workers](#) – one-third of workers required for a regular election – with barely 100 days until Election Day.

What is clear now is that voting must be easier, more accessible and safer than ever before. Vote-by-mail makes that possible. While President Trump peddles myths of mail-in voter fraud, [results show](#) that the practice is safe and secure and leads to higher turnout across all party affiliations. States with permanent vote-by-mail systems such as Colorado and Oregon have among the highest participation rates in the country. If states can securely mail drivers' licenses and the federal government can securely mail passports, the security of election ballots should be routine.

Empowering our citizens to vote is not a partisan issue – it is a fundamental promise of our democracy. It is an affirmation of citizenship and, as Lewis expressed so clearly, “The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union.” We should be fighting for every way possible to see that all of our citizens have a say in the present and future of our nation.

This week, my colleagues and I introduced the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. It continues the work to restore the protections that were removed from the Voting Rights Act seven years ago and strengthens our ability to prevent discriminatory practices. Lewis himself presided over the passage of this bill in the House in December. It presently sits in Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's legislative graveyard as he and his colleagues continue to deny the mere existence of voter suppression. Actions speak louder than words. This bill is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to our late colleague's life's work, to the rights of our citizens and communities of color, and our nation's democratic principles.

The Senate has several other pending opportunities, too. Senator Klobuchar and I have [introduced legislation to stop](#)

voter intimidation and battle deceptive practices, and I've supported myriad measures that would expand Americans' ability to vote by mail or absentee ballots. The forthcoming COVID-19 relief legislation also should include billions of dollars to assist in guaranteeing fair – and safe – elections.

I will keep working to ensure that everyone can cast their vote safely this year and encourage everyone to vote like their lives depend on it. We can't give up this fight. As we celebrate the legacy of John Lewis legacy and honor his work, it is our charge to continue marching toward justice and to bring others with us along the way.

Stay safe. Make a plan to vote.

Ben

Ben Cardin



**John Lewis**  @repjohnlewis · Mar 7

55 years ago today, we were beaten, tear gassed, and trampled by horses. I thought I saw death. I thought I was going to die. I don't know how I made it back, but I know we cannot rest. We cannot become weary. We must keep pushing and pulling and find a way to get in the way.



 3.3K

 42.3K

 162.7K



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