

# U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Fellow Marylander,

It's Labor Day Weekend. It's different this year – at least it should be. We still are in the middle of a pandemic. While there remain dangerous hotspots in other parts of the country, in Maryland, the number of COVID-19 cases have been trending in the right direction. But that does not mean we can let our guard down. It does not mean it's time to break out the grill and invite all the neighbors for a house party.

Please. Don't. Really.

House parties and family gatherings, traditionally a center piece of Labor Day festivities, have been [traced to approximately two-thirds of the COVID-19 transmissions](#) in some Maryland counties.

Yes, [outdoor events generally are better than indoor events](#), but please use caution. Even though you are with friends and family, you never know who may be asymptomatic or even where your cousins may have visited in the last few days. No one should be offended because the whole point is to keep everyone safe. So keep a reasonable distance. Wear a mask.

On this Labor Day, as we engage in socially distant or even virtual gatherings, let's all take a moment to remember the intended purpose of this holiday and thank the millions of workers whose hard work, strength and perseverance in the face of incredible challenges built our nation and continue to support our communities.

This year, we especially want to thank and show our appreciation for the millions of "essential workers" who have stayed on the job to protect our neighborhoods, care for the sick and elderly, stock the shelves at local grocery stores, or deliver food to our doorsteps. They have kept the electricity flowing and the water safe, and have been there for us when we needed to stay home longer than we ever imagined.

Across Maryland and nationwide, essential workers are putting their lives at risk because their jobs are directly related to supporting and treating the sick and interacting with people. Many essential jobs simply cannot be done via telework.

"The risk of infection may be greater for workers in essential industries who continue to work outside the home despite outbreaks in their communities, including some people who may need to continue working in these jobs because of their economic circumstances," says the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) report: "[COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups.](#)"

More than half of these COVID-essential workers are people of color (Black, Latinx, Asian American and other non-whites), increasing their risk for serious illness, according to a recent analysis from the [Economic Policy Institute](#). All of these workers have had to balance their professional responsibilities, or simply the need to pay their own bills, with the safety of their own families and their own lives.

Among health care workers alone – nurses, doctors, EMTs, pharmacists and other medical personnel – the CDC says there have been [at least 60,000 COVID-19 cases and about 300 deaths](#). These numbers are almost certainly understated, as the report indicates that only one-fifth of the information provided to the CDC included data that could help identify the person as a health care worker.

We need to do more to protect our essential workers and recognize the risks they are taking daily. More widespread testing, more readily available personal protective equipment (PPE), and better contact tracing is a starting point. The Heroes Act, which the House of Representatives passed nearly four months ago – included a “Heroes Fund” that would provide hourly hazard pay for essential frontline workers. There are bipartisan proposals in the Senate that also would provide a form of “hazard pay” for these dedicated workers. I’m taking a look at all of these proposals because I believe this is something we can and should get done for the brave and dedicated women and men who are putting their lives on the line for our communities.

Labor Day traditionally marks the end of summer and the start of fall, but this year should be a reminder that it was a holiday created to honor our nation’s workers. Our essential workers now need Congress to step up for them just as they have stepped up for us.

This Labor Day, I would be remiss if I did not mention the thousands of Marylanders and millions of Americans who have been furloughed or unemployed due to the pandemic. Practicing social distancing, wearing a mask, and engaging in commonsense public health measures honors our neighbors who are struggling to get by right now. It helps to curtail the spread of COVID-19 so that our family members and friends who are unemployed can get back to work faster.

The celebrations that typically occur this weekend may look different as we continue to find the best ways to mitigate the spread of this crippling pandemic. Our inability to be with our loved ones will be another collective loss in a year that has been rough for so many – physically, mentally, economically, and more. This year has been hardest on those who have lost loved ones and those who have lost their livelihoods. Through it all, the dedication and hard work of Marylanders and others on the frontlines are keeping us afloat and pointing us toward a future where scientists and medical researchers find solutions to the greatest public health challenge in the last century.

Thank you again for your dedication to our community and to protecting the people around you.

Stay safe and enjoy the holiday.

  
Ben