

The winter holiday season is upon us, and I would like to extend warm wishes to everyone in Maryland's Fifth Congressional District to have a safe and happy holiday. This is a time when we celebrate the traditions of the holidays with loved ones – families reunite, gifts are shared, many people partake in preparing and sharing meals, and make plans to attend parties and gatherings to celebrate the season.

With all of the cooking, decorating, entertaining and traveling, it is also important to keep in mind those who may not have the same opportunities, as well as those who are suffering or grieving instead of celebrating this joyous season, and ways that we Marylanders can help make the season a little easier for some of our neighbors.

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With a weakened economy, the need of our neighbors and communities is as great as any time in recent history. More families are struggling to put food on their table, meet their mortgage payments and pay their home heating bills. While everyone has felt the impact of the economic downturn in one way or another, now is the time when we are called upon to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

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Fortunately, thanks to our strong community spirit and our faith in Maryland's future, many Marylanders have made sure their holiday to-do lists include doing something to spread the joy of the holiday season to others, whether it is reaching out to the needy, making sure that all children have a gift to open, or preparing and delivering meals to the elderly and disabled. If you haven't already, I encourage you to review the philanthropic opportunities listed below and

take some time to make a monetary gift, donate your some of your possessions, or volunteer for one or more of these worthwhile causes to strengthen our communities and support our neighbors.

Local area food banks are **experiencing an unusually high volume of demand this year.** E ven a modest donation of food or other needed items is a contribution towards helping our neighbors in this time of great need.

The Maryland Food Bank, the only food bank serving the entire state, provides nearly 14 million pounds of food annually to an estimated 235,100 people through a network of more than 1,000 food providers throughout the state. You can donate food, dollars or time to enable the Food Bank to get more food to more people more often. For more information about making a donation or volunteering your time, you can visit their website at [<http://www.mdfoodbank.org>] or call 410-737-8282.

Listed below are additional organizations that coordinate donations and volunteer efforts for people in need.

Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake: www.goodwillches.org

Salvation Army: www.salvationarmyusa.org

Toys for Tots: www.toysfortots.org

United Service Organizations (USO): www.uso.org

If you have taken some time this holiday season to help your neighbors, thank you. Your efforts are surely making a difference for those who may not otherwise have much to look forward to this season. And, if you are still looking for something to do, there are a few days left to pitch in and bring some joy to your neighbors by sharing your time, talents and compassion with your community.