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## Public hearing scheduled on potential early voting sites

**Julie E. Greene**  
The Herald-Mail  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Washington County Board of Elections will host a public hearing on Tuesday, Sept. 9, to hear comments on potential 2026 early voting sites.

The election board's headquarters at 17718 Virginia Ave. in Halfway will likely

be chosen as an early voting site for the gubernatorial primary and general elections, County Election Director Barry Jackson said.

The other early voting sites in 2024 were the Smithsburg Library and the Boonsboro American Legion after the Washington County Free Library in downtown Hagerstown was the second early-voting site in 2022.

With almost 104,000 active registered voters, Jackson said three early voting sites are again required.

But, he said, the election board could pursue having a fourth early voting site. The budget includes funds for a fourth site.

If the election board wants a fourth

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This Herald-Mail file photo shows the Washington County Free Library central branch in downtown Hagerstown. PROVIDED BY THE HERALD-MAIL

## Minneapolis families mourn lost 'angels'



Mourners visit a memorial near the Annunciation Church, where a deadly shooting took place the day before, on Aug. 28 in Minneapolis. TIM EVANS/REUTERS

## Loved ones cope with loss after school shooting

**Thao Nguyen**  
USA TODAY

Families describing "unimaginable loss" mourned for their slain children Aug. 28, the day after an attacker fired through the windows of a Minneapolis Catholic church and sent worshipers diving behind and under pews for cover.

Jesse Merkel, the father of Fletcher Merkel, 8, called the suspected shooter a "coward" who took his son's life.

"Please remember Fletcher for the person he was and not the act that ended his life," Jesse Merkel said. "Give your kids an extra hug and kiss today."

The second child killed in the shooting was identified as 10-year-old Harper Moyski, according to a statement shared to news outlets on her family's behalf.

The deadly shooting occurred at the church connected to Annunciation Catholic School, a private elementary school with about 395 students, just before 8:30 a.m. local time on Aug. 27, authorities said. According to Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara, the shooter approached the outside of the church building and fired inside toward the children sitting in pews.

Eighteen other people, 15 of them students ages 6 to 18 and three parishioners in their 80s, were struck by gunfire, authorities said. All the injured were expected to recover, though family members of some say they will have long roads to recovery from serious bullet wounds.

Authorities have not publicly released the names of the victims shot in the attack, but families and friends began to identify their loved ones.

"We as a community have a responsibility to make sure that no child, no parent, no teacher ever has to experience what we've experienced today ever again," Annunciation School Principal Matt DeBoer said at a news conference

Aug. 27. "We lost two angels today. Please continue to pray for those still receiving care. Never again can we let this happen."

### Fletcher Merkel

Speaking at a news conference outside Annunciation Catholic School, Jesse Merkel recalled his son Fletcher Merkel as a loving child who enjoyed friends, fishing, cooking and "any sport that he was allowed to play."

The killer's violent actions brought tremendous loss to the family, Jesse Merkel said: "We will never be allowed to hold him, talk to him, play with him, and watch him grow into the wonderful young man he was on the path to becoming."

Fletcher Merkel was the second youngest of four children, family spokesperson Blois Olson told NBC News. Two of his siblings were also attending Mass and were not injured, according to NBC News and ABC11.

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## Anti-Trump protests set nationwide

Benefit cuts, president's wealthy backers targeted

**Sarah D. Wire**  
USA TODAY

Hundreds of thousands of Americans are expected to skip the barbecue and spend their Labor Day, Sept. 1, protesting President Donald Trump and the billionaires who support him.

"We're excited to see a lot of folks turning out and really turning up the heat on the administration and on the billionaires that are really driving the agenda, especially as we're seeing increased attacks on our communities," Saqib Bhatti, executive director of Action Center on Race and the Economy, told USA TODAY.

More than a thousand "Workers Over Billionaires" events are planned nationwide on Labor Day and the surrounding days.

Taking place in small and large cities in nearly every state, the events are designed to build on the momentum of other large-scale protests including No Kings Day in June and Good Trouble Lives On in July. They are led by labor organizations, including the AFL-CIO, and other advocacy groups such as May Day Strong, Public Citizen and Indivisible. The White House did not respond to a request for comment on the protests. Instead, it provided a quote from Vice President JD Vance about Democrats not voting for the GOP tax and spending bill and a quote from White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt about Labor Day.

"We finally have a president who fights and delivers for the American worker every single day. President Trump believes that American workers are the heart and soul of our economy and our national identity, which is why he's championed an agenda that puts them first always," she said.

Bhatti, whose group is focused on racial and economic activism, said many Americans don't see Trump's actions that way.

"Working-class people across the country are ready to fight back and to make sure that we don't just let billionaires run roughshod over our communities," Bhatti said.

Many of the advocacy groups planning the Labor Day protest were also involved in the nationwide "No Kings" demonstrations on June 14, which drew millions of participants across 2,100 locations; and the Good Trouble

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