

Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

Hon. Mayor Bowser and Dr. Laquandra Nesbitt -

I received a copy of the letter that Dr. Nesbitt shared with Councilmembers Gray and Pinto on August 20th, 2021, in response to their joint request on behalf of the DC Fitness Community to allow for full vaccination as a condition of participation in specific activities where concurrent mask usage would not also be required.

While your message was received clearly that, at that time, no exception would be made, you also made it equally clear that DC Health would continue to review data and evidence, using that to inform DC Health's guidance and requirements going forward. Now that we are more than 60 days since the reimplementation of the District's mask mandate, I am writing to implore you to uphold that commitment and examine the data that is available in reconsideration of the District's approach.

### **Recent Data**

Your August 20th letter cited a handful of studies<sup>1</sup> about the spread of COVID-19 in a fitness setting, but it is worth noting that all of these studies were based on data from early-to-mid 2020 and, in [some cases](#), involved individuals who blatantly ignored CDC and local quarantine guidelines, attending fitness classes after receiving a positive COVID test result or attending classes at a gym while symptomatic. It is bad policy to base a sweeping rule on data that is reflective of a small number of bad actors, and disappointing to see DC Health do so. Even DC Health's [own contact tracing data](#) that was released in December 2020 showed that **less than one percent of individuals testing positive for COVID-19 had attended a gym or fitness studio.**

But, most importantly, **all of this data cited as your decision-making input was produced before the widespread availability of vaccines!** As of Sep 20, 2021, the District has fully vaccinated [69.5 percent](#) of Adults over the age of 18 and [81.3 percent](#) of Adults have at least one dose. It is illogical to continue to make decisions based on data that is 12+ months old when vaccinations over the last 6 months have drastically changed the landscape.

More relevant data to inform decision-making would be to study the data from two, large Northeastern cities that have opted to allow fitness classes to continue with the requirement of vaccination in lieu of a mask requirement. In both New York City and Philadelphia, which have opted for this approach, we have not seen an increase in the trajectory of the Delta variant. In fact, Philadelphia's COVID-19 positivity percentage has fallen from 7.4 percent as of August 15th to just [2.2 percent as of September 29th](#). Likewise, New York City is also showing [decreasing trends](#) across all COVID-19 metrics as of September 29th.

I hope that this data helps inform how DC Health continues to evolve its approach to the pandemic.

### **Request for Parity**

As a fitness industry, we have simply asked for parity with other industries that do not require masks while indoors (in a practical sense). In your letter, you wrote "the CDC's guidance for the use of masks to slow the spread of COVID-19, last updated, August 2021, does not include an exception for gyms, health clubs, fitness, and yoga studios..." While it is true that bars, restaurants, and clubs **technically** have to follow the same guidelines, we know that in practice, these venues have been granted exceptions by DC Health. On any given night, you can find hundreds of individuals crowded into a U Street bar, at a Capitol Hill restaurant, or thousands at a performance or party at The Anthem enjoying themselves - singing, dancing and physically exerting themselves, shouting - maskless - so long as they have a drink somewhere nearby.

And to be unequivocally clear, we are not advocating that there is anything wrong with what is happening in other industries or that there be a change to the management of those industries/venues. We are simply advocating that we be treated the same as they are. A handful of studies that represent outlier scenarios in the fitness industry have been used as justification to retain end-to-end mask mandates for gyms and studios, but similar studies for other industries are seemingly overlooked as practical exceptions are made for those industries. No industry - ours or anyone else's - should be managed based on outlier data.

Please see the photos below and I beg you to tell me that, in your medical and professional opinions, that the typical DC fitness studio - many of which have taken the time and made the monetary investment to upgrade air filtration systems and sanitation protocols - is a less safe environment - particularly if everyone is known to be vaccinated.



*A fitness class at [solidcore] in Washington DC (photo taken pre-pandemic)*



Photo from Lil Durk concert at The Anthem on Aug 28 2021 retrieved from Instagram

### **Impact on Industry**

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, the mask mandate for fitness studios and gyms has resulted in devastating financial impact to these businesses - many of which are small and locally owned. In the weeks following the most recent mandate, I heard from peers whose numbers dropped 50 percent from the week prior - that is not insignificant - that's thousands of dollars for rent, employee pay, and equipment not coming in the door. And, to be clear, that is a 50 percent drop from pre-mandate performance that already significantly lagged pre-COVID numbers. Gyms - especially smaller, locally owned studios - are at higher risk of losing their space now than they were during the peak of the pandemic, as landlords are no longer waiving or delaying rent since they can see that studios are open. Landlords do not care how many people are in the studio - just that they are open.

SoulCycle and Barry's Bootcamp classes are not only not filling - they are nearly empty. And that is just two examples of dozens around the District. At [solidcore] - a workout that is likely the most approachable with a mask - we saw our numbers drop 10-15 percent after the reintroduction of the mask mandate. Just last week we saw another yoga studio – Faith Hunter Studio - close its doors because it was not bringing in enough clients to remain open.

Beyond the business itself, employees are directly feeling the impact. Most of the individuals who coach fitness classes are compensated based on utilization - meaning they get paid based on how many people are in the class. So now, not only are the businesses suffering as a result of the mandate, but the individual coaches - who are still showing up multiple times a week to teach their classes - are seeing their paychecks cut in half.

Finally, this is happening to businesses that have invested thousands of dollars – in some case hundreds of thousands – to create a safer environment for their clients and their staff. Upgraded filtration systems, individual sanitation stations, more equipment to eliminate sharing – these all come at a cost. Additionally, a number of studios across the city – including all of those who have signed onto this letter – are already requiring vaccinations as a requirement to entry. This is an industry that is proactively taking steps

to create a safe environment for those who come into their doors, as part of a larger public health effort in the District.

This mandate must be lifted in order to provide these businesses and their employees with the financial stability they need in order to survive.

I appreciate in advance your willingness to work with DC businesses to find a way to prioritize public health through vaccinations, while simultaneously creating an environment where businesses have the means to survive and thrive. It is no secret that while the fitness facilities were the first set of businesses to close, and the last to be allowed open, we are the only industry that has not yet received targeted government relief funding. And while this letter is not to make that ask, it is to ask that the DC Government stop adding insult to injury as the businesses that were able to survive continue to fight to return to some semblance of normalcy.

Thank you for your consideration and prompt attention to this.

Best,

Bryan Myers, CEO & President, [solidcore]

*Co-signed by:*

- *Chris & Alex Perrin, Co-Founders, Cut Seven*
- *David von Storch, Founder and President, VIDA Fitness & Sweatbox*
- *Evelyn Webster, CEO, SoulCycle*
- *Joey Gonzalez, CEO, Barrys Bootcamp*
- *Katie Collard & Burns Foster, Co-Founders, Coach Katie*
- *Paul London, CEO, Balance Gym Capitol Hill, Balance Gym Thomas Circle, Balanced Fitness Chevy Chase, F45 Columbia Heights*
- *Sadie Kurzban, Founder & CEO; Sam Karshenboym, COO, 305 Fitness*



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1. Lendacki FR, Teran RA, Gretsch S, Fricchione MJ, Kerins JL. COVID-19 Outbreak Among Attendees of an Exercise Facility-Chicago, Illinois, August-September 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2021;70:321-325. DOI: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7009e2.htm>; Groves LM, Usagawa L, Elm J, et al. Community Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 at Three Fitness Facilities- Hawaii, June-July 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2021;70:316-320. DOI: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7009e1.htm>

