



Members of the Lawrence City Commission,

I am writing to you today as the General Chair of Missouri Valley Swimming, Inc., the governing body for competitive swimming in all of Kansas and about half of the state of Missouri including Lee's Summit, Kansas City, Columbia, and Springfield. Our organization falls under the direction of USA Swimming, which is itself an extension of the United States Olympic Committee, as established by the Amateur Sports Act of 1978. Missouri Valley Swimming is responsible for the support and governance of 63 teams and around 7,400 registered athletes (see Attachment 1), including numerous athletes competing at the national level and aspiring to pursue swimming at the collegiate level and beyond. On behalf of our club and individual members, I am writing to request that you allow the opening of at least some of the Lawrence pools as soon as the Kansas and Douglas County reopening plans allows such use. I do so because my fellow board members and I believe that organized swimming is essential to the physical, emotional, and economic well-being of a large number of citizens in our communities and that USA-Swimming member clubs can play a key role in reopening this area of the economy in a safe and responsible fashion. We understand the difficult decisions you are making right now, and we want to provide you with additional information with respect to the opening of pools in Lawrence.

According to the Center for Disease Control, there is "no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, spas or water play areas," and that "proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water." The CDC goes on to recommend that patrons of recreational water venues protect themselves "by practicing social distancing and good hand hygiene" (see Attachment 2 and Attachment 7). Such statements are in line with the information we have received from USA Swimming, whose leaders have been working with experts across the country, including CDC and NIH personnel, to provide guidance to member clubs about how to return to the water safely (see Attachment 3). Swimming is also a non-contact sport. There is no physical contact between swimmers or between swimmers and their equipment such as in basketball, volleyball, softball, baseball, football, or many other sports. Based on the information we now have, we at Missouri Valley Swimming believe that a return to the water can be done safely, and we are prepared to implement strict guidelines in order to allow our athletes the opportunity to swim. (Also see Attachments 4, 5 and 6 for additional information on safe protocols for pool use.)

One might ask, why the urgency? The answer is twofold. First, we seek to meet the needs of our individual members. Missouri Valley Swimming's swimmers are outstanding athletes, many of whom have been training year-round for years. Unlike other sports, where cross training enables athletes to maintain a competitive level of fitness, competition readiness in swimming is not possible with prolonged periods out of the water. Most competitive swimmers take a week off around spring break at the end of the winter season (unless they are competing in the Kansas girls high school season in which case they skip that break), and take two to four weeks off at the

completion of the summer season and with the start of the school year (unless they are competing in the Missouri boys high school season in which case they skip that break). Most of our athletes have now been out of the water for nine weeks. As the weeks go by, conditioning they have worked so hard to attain is decreasing, and the length of time it will take them to get it back is increasing. Many of our athletes are doing their best to stay in shape. They are doing “dryland” workouts, attempting tethered swimming in backyard pools in cold temperatures and other subpar training. Continued restrictions on opening pools will be detrimental to the ability of these athletes to regain their form and perform at a high level. High school rising juniors and seniors in our area who have the goal of swimming in college need the opportunity to train for the meets that are scheduled to begin later this fall. Keeping them out of the water impedes their progress and puts them at a disadvantage in relation to swimmers in other states, where restrictions on pools have been less stringent. (Florida Governor DeSantis defined swimming as an essential activity last month in Executive Order 20-91, and swimmers in other states and nations are starting to be able to return to swimming).

There are also thousands of younger swimmers who have been out of school and had little opportunity to engage in structured physical activity. These young athletes need a constructive outlet as they continue to social distance, for as the CDC has noted, “staying physically active is one of the best ways to keep [the] mind and body healthy” in circumstances such as these. In short, we want to ensure that all our members have the opportunity reengage with the sport they love and are not unduly hindered in pursuit of their goals or the maintenance of their physical and mental health.

The other part of the equation is that our member clubs are small businesses that contribute to the economic well-being of the communities in which they are based. Most do not own their pools but rent space in private or government-owned facilities. Our coaches are professional coaches. Since the shutdown began, most have had employees file for unemployment, or have applied for support from the federal Paycheck Protection Program. While these clubs are financially solvent for the moment, this will not be the case if they are prevented from operation for much longer. Their owners will have to shut down operations and release staff, who in seeking employment, will likely take their skills and expertise to states where competitive swimming continues to function. If Missouri Valley swim clubs go out of business entirely, aquatics facilities will experience further budget shortfalls as the revenue stream from renting lanes to USA-Swimming registered teams dries up. Needless to say, if clubs go out of business the negative economic impact on our communities will be significant, but the fact that many of them also offer learn-to-swim programs suggests that the long-term outcome could be tragic. Drowning is entirely preventable, and it becomes a much greater future risk if we lose the people and organizations most invested in teaching swimming. Simply put, our communities need functioning swim clubs for the safety and well-being of our citizens.

Competitive swim training is being allowed at different levels in different areas. Wichita Swim Club owns its facility. It was able to obtain an essential use exemption from Sedgwick County. The exemption was based on the fire department’s use of the pool for training, but they have been allowed to use the pool for training and lap swimming using defined protocols (including online signups, limits on numbers of people in the building, no locker room use). They have been

using the facility for several weeks without incident. Kansas City is allowing youth sports when the stay-at-home order lifts on May 15th.

As you consider this request, rest assured that the safety and well-being of our members and our communities will be at the forefront of our efforts. The Missouri Valley Swimming Board of Directors and I believe that we in the competitive swimming community can help our states by being a model for responsible return to business.

Although our request is focused on pool use by Missouri Valley Swimming members for training, much of the guidance we have cited indicates that recreational swimming and learn-to-swim programming can also be permitted if facilities use specific practices (limited occupancy, timed shifts for pool use by different groups of people with facility cleaning in between, parents in the water with children taking swim lessons while maintaining six feet of distance between parent-child pairs and instructors, etc. see Attachment 7). Several area summer league teams plan to have their own swim team programming even if their leagues cancel competition for the summer to give their swimmers the opportunity to continue to progress as swimmers this year.

We touched on drowning prevention above, but it bears addressing again in the context of opening pools for uses beyond Missouri Valley Swimming training. Drowning prevention includes learn-to-swim programs as well as the pre-competitive and summer league swimming programs that help develop swimmers from being able to swim five yards to being able to swim distances of 25 yards or more. If pools do not open this summer, many children in our area will go without gaining water competency. Our states have lakes and backyard pools that will be open, and people will flock to them to get a break from the summer heat without the benefit of lifeguards and without the opportunity to enhance their swimming skills. These factors should be considered when assessing the costs and benefits of opening pools. (See for example, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/weather/child-drownings-are-spiking-during-covid-19-crisis-in-florida/vi-BB12D6zX>, Florida spike in drownings with distracted parents and lack of swim lessons.)

I invite you to reach out to me with any questions you might have. I would be happy to provide you with further information about Missouri Valley Swimming, USA Swimming, and the resources we have available related to aquatics.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Judith Deedy
General Chair, Missouri Valley Swimming, Inc.

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