



Mr. Eisenhauer,

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 the Kresge pool as possible. (Pool openings are currently allowed under Governor Parson's reopening plan.) 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. We note that the Kresge pool is a specialized facility. Since the pool was not designed for purely recreational use by children, it is easier to enforce social distance protocols at this facility than at some pools or gyms. You are in a position to allow limited use of the pool and allow our athletes a controlled environment for returning to their sport.

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 are prepared to implement strict guidelines in order to allow our athletes the opportunity to swim.

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're 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.

In making these requests, let me emphasize that there is a difference between pools being used for general open swim for hundreds of users and pools being used for structured, supervised training by limited numbers of swimmers in accordance with recognized safety protocols. We note that some municipalities have decided not to open this summer. These decisions have been based on multiple factors including financial losses suffered by municipalities related to the COVID-19 crisis, a lack of certainty regarding lifeguard training, and a reluctance to rely on teenage lifeguards to maintain social distancing. These issues should not be determinative in evaluating pool use by swim teams.

I propose that you allow the Kresge pool which can be used for competitive training purposes to open as soon as reopening plans allow it. The Missouri Valley Swimming Board of Directors and I recommend the following criteria be used to determine what constitutes a competitive training pool:

- 1) That facility operators are taking all precautions that apply to the reopening of gyms, and following pool-specific protocols in line with those recommended by USA-Swimming and the CDC (see Attachment 4 and Attachment 7);
- 2) That the pool be set up in such a way as to allow for proper distancing by using lane ropes and other dividers, and teams follow the best practices recommended by USA and Missouri Valley Swimming (as outlined in Attachment 3 and Attachment 5);
- 3) That the teams conducting practice in these pools be members in good standing of Missouri Valley Swimming (see list in Attachment 1);
- 4) That the coaches and athletes participating in practices be current individual members of USA Swimming and therefore both subject to and covered by the provisions of our group insurance;
- 5) That practice sessions not exceed the numbers outlined in the bans on large-gatherings imposed by state or local officials;
- 6) That before returning to practice, teams provide their members with written guidelines specific to their club and facility (see Attachment 6).

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, we note that 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). Recreational swimming includes a wide variety of uses from adult lap swimming to family swim in small facilities with small numbers of users to large pool complexes open to large numbers of people. The decision on whether to open the Kresge pool and which uses to allow can be based on various factors discussed in this letter.

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.

Email: jgdeedy@gmail.com, cell: 816-896-0318