Commissioner Johnson,

The Maine Fitness Coalition represents 38 Fitness Centers coming together, committed to our members safety, improving their health & wellness, and improving our economic viability. Fitness Centers in Maine serve approximately 25% of Mainers and are an important link in the health & wellness Continuum.

Thank you for all the work your department is doing balancing the challenging Covid-19 Pandemic safety measures and the pressure to keep Maine’s economy and many Maine industries alive.

Also, thank you for arranging and implementing the Maine Small Business Grant program. Fitness centers across the country have seen 20-60% reduction in revenues upon reopening. Nationally we have seen a 43% revenue decline, down 15 billion year to date. As a relatively fixed cost business that results in most fitness businesses rapidly burning through cash reserves. It is expected that 25-33% of Fitness businesses will not survive the pandemic. As Maine is predominately served by independent operator’s vs National chains with deeper pockets, it is likely a higher % of Maine clubs will fail with current restrictions in place.

Now that we have been open four months, have had no outbreaks traced back to Fitness Centers and new information from around the country has become available, we believe the extremely restrictive measures Maine implemented back in June, although well intended, are overkill and restricting our ability to serve our customers. We also believe the public statements made by Maine State policy makers that “Gyms are not safe” has done great harm to fitness consumer confidence and impacted the number of people coming back to our clubs, and our financial viability.

We have three requests to modify the States Guidelines to allow us to safely serve more Mainers health needs and improve our economic viability.

1. An increase in capacity from a maximum of 50 patrons to either 50% capacity or 5/1,000 sq/ft to match the retail guideline. Currently Maine has the most restrictive capacity limitations in the country.
2. A reduction in the 14’ Physical Distancing for intense exercise without masks to 10’. It is currently more than double much of the country, and 4’ greater than most of the remaining more conservative states.
3. A public statement confirming the importance of physical activity to maintain proper health and a confirmation that based on national and state data that “Fitness Centers are safe when following the state’s guidelines.”
4. Capacity Increase Rationale:

* State, National, and International data show clubs are safe [Global data show transmission in gyms is rare](https://hub.ihrsa.org/e2t/tc/VXhYwH5WmZNpW4d85pt1wMVl0W7lBRbf4hmyTbN3tskG73p_b1V1-WJV7CgFvmN1pG1bLjMhWvV7qjmf61lK_PW5Bjm_d6rtqGcW6YKH0w4Q4fMvW4bMjFz3Vh14JW20R2vn312jC1W5BnZT_7M0dDmW13_mVP4gFjYnW7RkYPr5tqp14W7-czlC4ZvqGGW1F1J_K8ggktYW7fFfdq57P6TRW2frwWY49xVKRW1kMJhn72r_74W12Hv3k1VVchlN1_fvCGM4SyFW51n81p2qjD_YN3NXkLCJHNjZW86pSFl7RTCDCT-Gsg3yLCpYVwLb_s70ZVJ7N27Ztb8bcnzzW89-spc6jTWLjW215C0p8zPq96W5vx9XL2ljyw9W5FYv8y2M-5HXW3TR3C732Zwv_V1zSG623j3DqW88BlBd97-3nCN1WZdNn4n98L3pbZ1)
  + MXM a national industry data company worked with IHRSA, our industries International Trade association to poll 2,877 clubs serving 49,400,000 work outs and found only 1,155 self-reported cased of Covid-19 infected people having been in the clubs pre or A-symptomatically. That’s 0.0023% or 2.3 cases/100,000 visits, and is more than the average annual usage of a Fitness Center in Maine. No cases of community transfer were reported from those visitors or by the CDC’s in their states.
  + A similar study in England ([ukactive data](https://www.healthclubmanagement.co.uk/health-club-management-news/COVID-19-gyms-fitness-ukactive-/346146" \t "_blank)) tracked – 8,000,000 workouts in 1,300 clubs with only 17 reported cases. None of which were traced to contraction at the club.
  + Australia’s study also showed very low exposure with only 13 reported cases out of 6,260,000 work outs in 1,300 clubs with zero reported cases of community transmission.
* Many Policy Makers have unfairly lumped Fitness Centers in the same risk category as bars and restaurants.
  + A recent CDC study confirms the risk of transfer in bars & restaurants and also says “We found no significant association of people visiting Health clubs acquiring Covid-19”. [Close Contact, Dining out cause spread, not clubs](https://hub.ihrsa.org/e2t/tc/VXhYwH5WmZNpW4d85pt1wMVl0W7lBRbf4hmyTbN3tskG73p_b1V1-WJV7CgYrJW4_p-2_7JgFQDVk9RL57bmYDSW8lzn1c8VP3T8W82r2B52BtQ4bVtSsnz7hCxCFW60b1f01Cgjf1N28YvNLcH5X0W5dP3p05fTBvgW1KqdTG42ZxFTW3BJHjC1nSNbnW4zq8mp8ryVpMW8SFY896TB_wlW4GMWDq1RnmPqW1BJjCj32MTYyT7rMn8gXxMWW8p_FvV99jbydW2jh7Xw2bL0-VW7gD36R22-Tx0VNp_R94t4L_bW6JxN0P5XlkJwW8Xrhlg8fk5_yW8rlh2B2xfLPmW4yx0vN8mKVRPW4HQKdX4Qg58KW30MNdV8NqBR8W1qD56p3xp038W5Ph0yk6WSsYCW3_QFQQ7RTN5sN3TsZqywjczbW80WKbh58XWq639521)
  + Fitness Centers have great control over the location of our visitors. Using equipment spacing and location marking in Group Exercise we can easily separate people effectively.
  + Unlike restaurants and bars who have already been granted 50% capacity (Many Maine Fitness centers are below 20% capacity with a 50 person limit), we do not serve alcohol, thus our patrons have greater awareness of their interactions with each other.
  + Another significant difference between Health Clubs and bars or restaurants is our ongoing and strong relationships with our members who use the clubs regularly. We don’t have to “train” each customer how to behave every visit. We only need to train them one time, then monitor and manage compliance.
* Most Fitness Centers have either multiple separated spaces or very large, high ceiling, airy spaces allowing for greater separation and spacing between clients.
* Gainesville Health & Fitness, an industry leading Florida Fitness Center partnered with the University of Florida to study air quality in their Fitness center. The study found no Covid-19 virus in the air. See  [COVID-19 not detected in Florida gym](https://hub.ihrsa.org/e2t/tc/VXhYwH5WmZNpW4d85pt1wMVl0W7lBRbf4hmyTbN3tskG73p_b1V1-WJV7Cg-H9W44p9QF6NWLT3VhG-WN5TMyc7N7-hxmZMPdw6W44c9-v2MyWnwW2LPlzp6qhj0MW6VXm2W7LG2nQVJZDWb6KzpCKW2VryW38MbF0JW3Xx-0Y7yx0Y6W4n6YcL5QrtCLW6t980b2nfsGpW7fbvjG5nhq9QW6LJd8b4dy8ZYW1_HCS229q79DN66Sy82dX28CW7t6xFW9g3bd2W6d778-4xXQ9GW177Gf910wwh5VqXyhR7V_g9LW3g4qWN75SydTW8DSc5q6WdzvHW6rxmvr549-0VVHjk6_8-CTKCW2dXH6K3bz6bXVrJ3Pk3JRjnmN3vlkXKf6HpKW5Bykz22lMxlRW4S_6Q62m_22hMp6TydtgFPZV55GBt2xR8lS3cDT1).
* Sanitizing equipment is easy and was already standard practice after SARS and H1N1 in most Fitness Centers.
* Because of our industries standard check in procedures and customer data access we can easily do contact tracing should we need to.
* Our Northern New England neighbors have much less restrictive capacity issues –
  + Vermont - 1 person/200 sq/ft = (5/1,000 sq/ft like our retail)
  + NH - 50% capacity
  + RI - 1 person/150 Sq/ft (6.6 people/1000 sq/ft)
  + CT – 50% capacity

1. Physical Distancing Reduction to 10’ Rationale.

* We have worked with two University researchers (UNE & UMO) and found no data to support 14’.
* We acknowledge the increase breathing intensity may expel moisture droplets and aerosols beyond 6’ though we cannot find definitive information how far that is.
* The Majority of US States use the CDC’s recommendation of 6’ and to date we are only aware of one case of transfer in a Boutique that was not segregating exercisers.
* Of the states that have distancing limits greater than 6’, there seems to be an equal distribution between 8’, 10’, and 12’. Maine was the first to go to 14’, followed only by a couple other states.
* Louisiana, with physical distancing requirements of only 6’ and 50% capacity limits list Gyms & Fitness Centers among the lower risk businesses in the state. [https://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3997](https://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3997%20)

1. Supporting a Public Statement endorsing the importance of exercise and the safety of Fitness Centers following State guidelines.

* The Fitness Industry helps people be healthier! In the past year, the national obesity rate has jumped from 39-42%. Heart Disease kills 850,000 Americans per year, three times more than the expected Covid fatalities this year. Physical activity is paramount in maintaining health and preventing/reducing Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes, and mental illness.
  + Canadian Policy makers have stated, “The health benefits from keeping Fitness Centers open outweighs the risk of contracting Covid-19 in them.
  + Emicity research reported in their October 2020 California Health & Wellness Report that 86% of respondents to a survey said their health has suffered in at least one way due to the closure of their Fitness Centers.
  + There is a growing concern about the magnitude of the next health crises and it’s cost to the Healthcare system: Increased cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression, due in part to the social measures used to curb the pandemic.
* Scotland policy makers have committed to keep clubs open saying “The health benefit from exercising outweighs the risk of contracting Covid-19 in a Fitness Center.”
* Anecdotally, I’ve had conversations with a handful of people at the grocery store, dump, gas station or golf course that say “The Governor said “Gym’s aren’t safe”, so I’m not coming back till there’s a vaccine”.

We acknowledge the difficult challenge the Covid-19 Pandemic presents and understand the rationale behind the initial safety measures Maine initiated. With winter coming and outdoor exercise quickly becoming untenable, we are seeing increased demand for our services, yet we are turning people away from our relatively empty clubs. We know we can safely serve more them 50 people in our generally large buildings.

We now have much more information and a better understanding of transmission and have seen that Fitness Centers can be safe. We ask the Commission to review our requests and make the needed adjustments to the Fitness Center Checklist, allowing us to help more Mainers safely be healthier. We remain available for follow up questions and discussion.

Respectfully,

The Maine Fitness Coalition

Scott Gillespie, Maine Fitness Coalition Founder & Owner Saco Sport & Fitness

Mike Cleary, Owner Five Planet Fitness

Joanna Pease, Owner Jibe Cycle