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Member of Assembly 64th District

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The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

The Honorable Mitchell Silver
Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

May 6, 2020

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver:

As the temperature climbs and days become longer and hopefully, the end of the COVID-19 outbreak comes into view, the residents of our great city are sure to exhibit a natural desire to leave their apartments and homes for outdoor recreational activity. Just as we encouraged Governor Andrew Cuomo to remove restrictions on outdoor work, we now recommend that you consider relaxing restrictions on certain recreational activity like going to beaches, utilizing our golf courses, and playing tennis. We believe that this can be done in a safe and responsible manner.

The fact that our city is blessed with 14 miles of beaches creates an important outlet for recreation that is accessible to most New Yorkers. Your administration has stated that that beaches might not open this summer, even if it safe, due to the financial cost. We encourage you to consider opening the beaches for non-swimming activities, as people have a desire for recreational activities for both physical and mental wellness and science shows that ultraviolet wavelengths quickly destroy the virus and transmission is reduced when outdoors.

With the recent decision for schools and swimming pools to remain closed through the summer, families with children will need recreational outlets more than ever, and our beaches can continue to provide this valuable resource. Furthermore, after your administration's announcement to open 40 miles of streets to pedestrians, and a goal of at least 60 more miles, closing off beaches as a means of social distancing would seem illogical.

The City of New York also operates 13 golf courses throughout four of the five boroughs. Prior to the classification of golf courses as non-essential businesses, operators were pro-active in creating safeguards, such as prohibiting the removal of flagsticks, scheduling tee times for only two people rather than the customary foursome, limiting golf carts to one rider, or banning the use of golf carts at all. Governor Phil Murphy of New Jersey and our own Governor Cuomo have recently adopted some of these measures in the reopening of both state owned and private courses, and there is no reason why the same cannot be accomplished in our city.

Along with golf, another activity that can be permitted with reasonable social distancing is tennis. The city operates numerous tennis courts in all five boroughs. The United States Tennis Association (USTA) recently released a set of guidelines to promote safe play amidst the current environment, including wearing gloves, using a separate set of balls for each player, removing the rule for change ends of the court, and using a foot or racquet to return a ball back to an opponent or players on another court. The city can also consider allowing singles matches only, in the interest of removing all possibility of human-to-human contact.

In all three areas, the city can take additional safety measures such as closing changing rooms, shutting down water fountains, and offering free hand sanitizer.

It is clear that your Administration has made mental health initiatives a distinct priority, and when combining the current health crisis with a correlating economic crisis, the mental health of all city residents has been placed at risk. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) identify regular exercise and enjoyable activity as effective methods to cope with this stress, and we can trust that New Yorkers will be able to do it responsibly.

Very truly yours,

Nicole Malliotakis
NYS Assemblymember

Andrew Lanza
NYS Senator

Steven Matteo
NYC Council Minority Leader

Joseph Borelli
NYC Councilmember

Michael Reilly
NYS Assemblymember