

RE: Public hearing on Executive Order 122-20, COVID-19 Local Order on Thursday, Nov. 5

Dear Montgomery County Council,

I write to inform the Council of key facts and data involving fitness centers and gyms (collectively, “gyms”). Multiple studies have confirmed that COVID exposure and transmission is extremely low at gyms. For example, in September 2020, a United States-wide study analyzing almost 3000 gyms found that after “49.4 million health club visits, only 0.0023 percent tested positive for COVID-19.” See <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/national-study-confirms-its-safe-to-work-out-at-the-gym-current-data-shows-no-evidence-of-covid-19-spread-in-gyms-301122664.html>.

Further, an October 2020 study found that in the UK, gym “sites have seen more than 45 million visits, with an overall rate of 0.99 cases per 100,000 visits” even though the UK rate for the general population was “150.83 cases per 100,000 people.” See <https://www.ukactive.com/news/fitness-and-leisure-sector-continues-close-monitoring-of-covid-19-rates-in-uk-gyms-and-leisure-facilities/>.

Accordingly, the data establishes that gyms should not be treated as risky locations. Moreover, gyms increase the health of the public, and provide a place for people to get healthier and avoid obesity. “Obesity increases the risk of dying of Covid-19 by nearly 50% and may make vaccines against the disease less effective.” See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/26/obesity-increases-risk-of-covid-19-death-by-48-study-finds>.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the Council keeps these facts in mind when deciding what actions to take with respect to gyms. Specifically, in the future, should COVID get worse in our county, the Council should **not** enact a blanket closure of gyms, and certainly should **not** treat gyms the same way restaurants, personal services, and religious facilities are treated. None of those business **increase** physical health, and none have the overwhelming data that gyms have establishing their lack of risk. Finally, the Council should not treat gyms with a broad brush. Rather, a scalpel approach would be wiser. For example, restricting 1-on-1 personal training or restricting classes in gyms makes more sense than imposing restrictions on the entire gym, especially when gym-goers on the general gym floor can keep 6 feet apart. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Joseph Kaufman, 11/4/2020