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August 20, 2020

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

Mitchell J. Silver, FAJCP
Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks & Recreation
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver:

Now, more than ever, New York City parks are the lifeblood of our communities. During the pandemic, families have flocked to outdoor spaces as a safe way to socialize, get fresh air and exercise. Despite clear state guidance and clearance for youth sports post Phase 3, we have been notified that permits will not be granted for fall youth sports¹. We are writing to express our concern about the arbitrary nature of this decision and the lack of clarity regarding why youth sports will not be allowed.

It is hard to quantify the losses that our children have suffered during this pandemic. Every shred of normalcy has been removed from their lives. So many children are hoping to play their fall sports and are counting the days until they can do so. At this time, we do not see any guidance that should prohibit this from happening. This morning, NYC Parks sent out an email that stated, "We continue to allow sports activity of low to moderate risk on our courts and fields across the city on a first-come, first-served basis, in accordance with the State's reopening guidelines for sports and recreation." It is our view that permitting these activities would be advantageous to ensure they are organized, socially-distanced, supplied with PPE, thermometers, contact tracing and sanitizer. The privilege of a permit would come with assurances that health and safety guidelines are adhered to.

The current numbers of COVID transmission are very encouraging, but as realists we know that this could change at any time. A second spike could be a reality later in the fall. Every effort should continue to be made to follow those numbers and revoke these permits if the numbers begin to rise dramatically. We request that NYC Parks reconsider their current stance on this matter. Instead, we request that you issue a "Conditional Youth Sports Permit" that requires Department of Health guidelines be created and followed.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns. We look forward to working together with you to keep the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of our children and families a foremost priority.

Sincerely,

Andrew S. Gounardes
Member of Senate

Justin Brannan
NYC Councilman

Max Rose
Member of Congress

¹<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationMasterGuidance.pdf>