

**Senate Committee on Health Care**  
**Informational Hearing – Impact of COVID-19 Public Health Measures on Business**  
**Virtual Testimony by Dianna Risley**  
**February 10, 2021**

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Knopp, Members of the Committee:

My name is Dianna Risley and I live in Hood River, Oregon. I am the General Manager of Gorge Athletic Clubs, where I have health clubs in both Hood River and in The Dalles. I also serve as a member of the Board of Directors for the Oregon Health & Fitness Alliance which advocates on behalf of the more than 450 health and fitness clubs in Oregon. I am here today to speak to you about the impacts of the COVID-19 closures and restrictions on health and fitness facilities and on our club members.

As we approach the one year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are continuing to see the significant impact it is having on both the short and long-term health of our neighbors and our communities. While the spread of the virus continues to remain a significant threat, so does the threat that prolonged restrictions and closures are already having on the long-term physical and mental health of those who rely on health and fitness facilities for their social, emotional and physical well-being.

At Gorge Athletic Clubs, we have seen the health, mobility and emotional wellness of our members decline, some significantly. One of our members suffers from Parkinson', and prior to the pandemic he could walk 1-2 miles without assistance. Now, he is no longer independent, not able to drive and is permanently in a wheelchair. The impact on our elderly members has been the most significant with steep declines in their mobility due to lack of access to our specialty equipment like recumbent bikes, arm crank machines, and therapy pool. But it isn't only the disabled and elderly the restrictions have impacted. Many of those who suffer from mental illness use exercise as a healthy coping mechanism. Just two weeks ago, I spoke with a fellow health club owner who spent the morning talking one of her members through a dangerous and life-threatening mental health crisis brought on by her inability to access the services that help her cope with the challenges we are all facing right now.

These are real and significant health impacts that our members are experiencing due to the prolonged, state-mandated closure and the continuing restrictions on health and fitness facilities. And the most devastating aspect of these mandates is that they are not based on any evidence or data that points to increased transmission of the virus in these facilities. In fact, not a single publicly reported COVID-19 outbreak has been traced back to a health or fitness facility in Oregon.

Health and fitness facilities are safe. We are taking all of the necessary precautions and doing everything we can to ensure the health and safety of our members. Many that go beyond those mandated by the current OHA guidance. We are in the business of health and wellness. We would never recommend bringing our members back to our clubs if we didn't believe that they are safe and that the benefits of getting people back to their fitness routines outweighed the risks.

The recent updates to the reopening guidance for facilities in extreme-risk counties was a step in the right direction but failed to provide meaningful access to most of Oregon's health and fitness facilities. The arbitrary capping of occupancy at four groups of six individuals in any facility larger than 30,000 square feet or even the cap of 50 people max, regardless of facility size, in high-risk counties does not provide access to those who need it most. Even more challenging is the requirement that individuals must maintain 25 feet of distance in any of these facilities. This is a mandate that essentially pulled the

rug out from some of the smaller facilities that were hoping the change might provide a lifeline for their facilities to reopen, for their employees to return to work, and for their members to get back into their fitness routines.

To date, we have heard no scientific justification for *why* the capacity of our facilities was capped in this arbitrary way, instead of limiting capacity as a percentage of occupancy, as nearly every other industry is under OHA guidance. The Oregon Health & Fitness Alliance has recommended that facilities in extreme risk counties be permitted to reopen with an extremely limited occupancy of just 15%. And that in all risk categories, a percentage of max occupancy be used instead of arbitrary caps on numbers. Using a percentage of maximum occupancy for limitation would ensure that all facilities, like some of our partner clubs which encompass 250,000, 400,000 or even 650,000 square feet, would be permitted to accommodate a reasonable number of members at any given time.

My goal, and that of my fellow industry members, remains the same as it has since the beginning of the pandemic – to get my club members safely back to their health and fitness routines with access to the tools they need. My heart is breaking for those whose access to these vital health and wellness services is being restricted and for those who will not recover from the impacts of these restrictions. We must find a reasonable and responsible way to safely reopen these facilities to ensure the long-term social, emotional and physical health of our communities.