

June 17, 2021

Hon. Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate

Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

Hon. Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate

Hon. Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Re: GYMS Act

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell and Leader McCarthy:

As the country begins recovering from the supreme economic and public health crisis created by COVID-19, it is vital that we strengthen and reinforce the institutions which promote health and fitness. These institutions are key pieces to restoring America's fiscal, physical, and mental health.

For these reasons, we urge you to include [H.R. 890](#) and [S. 1613](#), the Gym Mitigation and Survival Act (GYMS Act), as part of any forthcoming economic recovery legislation. The bill would establish a grant program to support health and fitness-related businesses devastated by the pandemic and government mandated shutdowns.

COVID-19 has exacted a heavy toll on Americans' already poor health. Before the pandemic reached our shores, the U.S. was already battling epidemics of obesity and chronic disease, both of which respond to physical activity. But in the last decade, upwards of 27% of Americans ages 6 and older were inactive. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen decreased physical activity across multiple populations.²¹ This is a step in the wrong direction: physical

¹2021 Physical activity council's overview report on U.S. participation, https://eb6d91a4-d249-47b8-a5cb-933f7971db54.filesusr.com/ugd/286de6_610088e5e73d497185ac181a240833a9.pdf

²<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/07/417951/physical-activity-dropped-worldwide-during-covid-19-raising-concerns-health>

activity is a cost-effective way to prevent and reduce chronic health conditions like heart disease, stroke, and type-2 diabetes, which account for approximately 90% of nationwide healthcare costs.² Many of these conditions have sadly been linked to higher risk of hospitalization for COVID-19,³ and odds of hospitalization were over three times higher among the group with the lowest compared to the highest peak exercise capacity. Research has shown that physical activity is a top predictor of COVID-19 outcomes.

The pandemic has brought about significant and long lasting negative effects on our mental health as well. During the pandemic, 4 in 10 U.S. adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders, compared to just 1 in 10 in 2019.⁴ Another study found that depression rates tripled during COVID-19, skyrocketing from 8.5% to 27.8%.⁵ According to the CDC, young adults more frequently reported COVID-19-related trauma, starting or increasing substance use to cope with COVID-19-related stress and serious suicidal ideation in the previous 30 days.⁶ The statistics paint a grim picture of mental health in America today. We have much work to do to get Americans back on track to happy and healthy living.

The relationship between physical activity and mental health has long been known, with government and health agencies like WHO Europe⁷, the CDC⁸, and Australia's Health Direct⁹ making clear the benefits of exercise for mental health.

Research shows that people who are more physically active:

- are happier,¹⁰
- experience greater levels of excitement and enthusiasm,¹¹
- are more satisfied with life, and
- have higher self-esteem.¹²

An analysis of 852,068 adults (out of 1.2 million surveyed) associated exercisers with 43.2% fewer self-reported mental health burdens per month than nonexercisers.¹³ The study observed this relationship across all ages, racial groups and household incomes. Studies have shown a beneficial effect of exercise on depression symptoms across a wide age range from children to

² <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/costs/index.htm>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/underlying-evidence-table.html>

⁴ According to a new Kaiser Permanente brief, "The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use,"

⁵ A study from the [Boston University School of Public Health](https://www.bu.edu/schoolofpublichealth/)

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

⁷ https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/403182/WHO-Motion-for-your-mind-ENG.pdf

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/about-physical-activity/why-it-matters.html>

⁹ <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/exercise-and-mental-health>

¹⁰ <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/260310>

¹¹ https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2012-02/ps-pay020812.php

¹² <https://dc.uwm.edu/uwsurca/2016/Posters/74/>

¹³ Chekroud, S.R., et al. 2018. Association between physical exercise and mental health in 1.2 million individuals in the USA between 2011 and 2015. A cross-sectional study. *Lancet Psychiatry*, 5(9), 739-46.

older adults.¹⁴ Regular exercise also nurtures children physically, mentally, and emotionally. In addition to reducing their risk of chronic disease, it boosts confidence, self-esteem, well-being, and academic performance and contributes to emotional development and happiness.¹⁵ Prioritizing physical activity means prioritizing cost savings, health, and happiness.

America's more than 40,000 fitness facilities are a vital piece of America's healthcare system, serving as the first line of defense for our nation's health. These facilities provide safe space and supporting programs for more than 70 million Americans to take charge of their health and fitness, preventing and treating chronic diseases and maintaining their mental health. America's fitness facilities are the solution to so much of what ails America's health. While helping to safeguard Americans' health, the industry as a whole also contributes more than \$35 billion to the economy and provides work for more than 3.2 million Americans.

Government mandated COVID-19 business closures and restrictions have taken an enormous toll on fitness facilities across the country. Fitness facilities nationwide were among the first businesses ordered to close and the last allowed to reopen. Upon reopening, they operated under some of the most restrictive guidelines, resulting in economic devastation for the facilities and their workers. One out of every five fitness facilities has closed permanently as of December 31, 2020, and tens of thousands more are at risk. The fitness industry as a whole lost 58 percent of annual revenue—amounting to \$20.4 billion in 2020 alone¹⁶—and 1.4 million fitness industry employees lost their jobs. As our nation continues to constrain the COVID-19 pandemic and recover from its desolating impact, fitness facilities require and deserve specific assistance. Not only due to the economic harm they have suffered, through no fault of their own, but due to the critical role they play in restoring Americans' physical and mental health.

America's fitness facilities are a vital part of the solution to ensuring the United States never endures another year like 2020. The GYMS Act is the means to ensure that America's fitness facilities will prevail and continue to provide a safe space and programming to improve America's health. The GYMS Act would institute a program aimed to help struggling fitness facilities where owners apply for grants from the Small Business Administration (SBA) and use the funds for payroll, rent, mortgage, utilities, insurance, and other expenses fitness facilities normally incur. U.S. fitness facilities could recoup a percentage of 2019 revenue to replace revenue lost amid the pandemic and mandatory closures if the bill is made law.

We urge you to include the GYMS Act in economic recovery legislation. The GYMS Act is not just an investment in America's fitness facilities, it is a necessary investment in Americans' physical and mental health.

¹⁴ <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09323-y>

¹⁵ http://sshs.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_526000_en.html

¹⁶ <https://www.clubindustry.com/commercial-clubs/u-s-health-club-revenue-fell-by-58-percent-2020>

Sincerely,

American College of Sports Medicine
American Council on Exercise
Climbing Wall Association
Coalition for the Registration of Exercise Professionals
Community Gyms Coalition
Fitness Business Association
IDEA Health & Fitness Association
International Council of Shopping Centers
International Franchise Association
International Health Racquet and Sportsclub Association
International SPA Association
JCC Association of North America
Medical Fitness Association
National Academy of Sports Medicine
Sports & Fitness Industry Association
Yoga Alliance

CC: President Joseph R. Biden