

April 29, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo  
Governor of the State of New York  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

RE: Public Health Urgency to Open Swim Schools + Learn-to-Swim Programs to Avoid Drowning Fatalities in New York State

Dear Governor Cuomo and team,

Thank you for your incredible service to New Yorkers and the United States in this time of crisis. We write regarding drowning, another imminent and grave public health issue that escalates this time of year. Drowning is completely preventable. We request that your executive order be amended to allow swim schools and other learn-to-swim programs to reopen in Stage 2 of New York State's plan.

There is no single way to prevent drowning, but formal swimming lessons reduce drowning risk by 88% according to the Centers for Disease Control<sup>1</sup>. Swimming is an essential life skill for every child, famously promoted by US Founding Father Benjamin Franklin in the 18th century. Drowning is the number one cause of death for children ages 1 to 4 and a leading cause of death for young people up to 14 years of age.<sup>2</sup> Families of color are disproportionately at risk.

We believe fatal drowning incident risk will be even higher now that schools, daycares and other children's activities are closed. This gives children more time to find a body of water such as a backyard pool, neighbor's pool, community pool, inflatable pool, beach, lake or other body of water. A young child can drown in less than 2 inches of water.<sup>3</sup> Many New York parents throughout NYS either do not know how to swim, are uneducated about the vigilance necessary for safety when their kids are swimming, nor how to respond in an emergency. This is serious.

Parents have perfect distraction machines in their hands every moment with mobile technology. They must work remotely and thus are unable to supervise their children at all times. Even before this pandemic, 9 out of 10 child related drowning deaths happened when a caregiver was supervising.<sup>4</sup> 69% of children who drowned

were not expected to be at or in the pool, yet they were found in the water. 77% of drowning victims had been out of sight for less than five minutes.<sup>5</sup>

Private swim schools in New York State educate tens of thousands of children per week to learn to swim. Unlike public pools, our programs are controlled learning and interactive environments. We understand that modifications will need to be put in place once swim schools/learn-to-swim programs reopen, and each swim school has developed detailed plans for each location. While an instructor needs to stay within a reachable distance from a non-swimmer, we are committed to taking concrete steps to ensure social distancing within all other aspects of our facilities. Yes we are businesses, but our businesses are wholly focused on safety however fun we make the learning process.

There is no way to teach water survival or swim skills remotely, and the health risk from COVID-19 in instructional settings should be very low. Advice from the CDC states that chlorine and bromine in our swimming pools inactivate the virus. Chlorine and bromine are disinfectants. There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread through the water in pools. The industry is working to establish best practices, and we are willing to engage in a science-based dialogue with New York State and Federal health officials regarding which measures would be appropriate for learn-to-swim programs and pools of all kinds.

As a fellow parents, we hope you will agree that teaching swimming is essential to keeping our children safe. If you have any questions, we would be delighted to answer them. Please contact Lisa Zarda, Executive Director for the United States Swim School Association at [lisa@usswimschools.org](mailto:lisa@usswimschools.org) or 480-447-4987.

We look forward to working together to reduce the risks to our children and communities. We are grateful for your time and consideration.

### Signatories

Lisa M. Zarda, CAE<sup>(L)</sup><sub>(SEP)</sub> Executive Director<sup>(L)</sup><sub>(SEP)</sub> United States Swim School Association

Adam B. Katchmarchi, Ph.D., EMT-B  
Executive Director  
National Drowning Prevention Alliance

Sabeena Hickman, CAE<sup>(L)</sup><sub>(SEP)</sub> President & CEO<sup>(L)</sup><sub>(SEP)</sub> Pool & Hot Tub Alliance

Michelle Kavanaugh  
Executive Director  
California Pool & Spa Association

Christy Bostic  
Executive Director  
Hope Floats Foundation

Jim Spiers  
President  
Stop Drowning Now and SwimJim Inc

Heidi Reiss  
Co-Owner and Office Manager  
AquaBeba