



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 19, 2020

Dear Governor Murphy,

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on the lives of every person in this nation, with New Jersey residents being especially hard-hit. The loss of life is an anguish that we will all carry with us as we make decisions that impact the lives of those around us. **We cannot let this virus destroy our bodies, our faith, and our future.** I am asking that you take necessary steps to open much-needed segments of our daily lives with precautions that are focused on protecting the lives of the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, and the disabled. We all must work together on a plan to survive and reopen.

South Jersey is hurting, and businesses need to start opening, but we must help inform their decisions to open safely and with the proper precautions in place; both can be done.

I am asking that you do not destroy the future of South Jersey by continuing draconian restrictions that inhibit people's faith or their business success during the looming summer season. As you know, South Jersey is dependent upon the summer season and the tourism it brings, with many businesses solely relying on summer tourism revenue. This drives our restaurants, salons, retail stores, hotel industry, casinos, gyms, and numerous other sectors. This shutdown not only hurts the business owners, it hurts the staff.

Restaurants could operate in a safe manner by offering limited seating, providing proper sanitation and PPE, and ensuring proper distancing while still being able to offer more opportunity to dine inside. We have more than anecdotal evidence of the success that other areas of this country have seen with how to successfully operate and keep their patrons and staff safe.

Salons and cosmetology professionals should be allowed to operate with the similar restrictions in place for distancing, disinfecting and hygiene that would allow for them to operate effectively.

Retail businesses need to be able to do more than curbside pickup. Protections must be enacted for the businesses and the customers to ensure safety, but these can be done while also allowing the business owners to welcome customers into the stores.

The hotels and casinos must be allowed to begin operations even if at a limited capacity temporarily.

These businesses are normally preparing for their season to begin around this time, but now they are waiting on a date which you have not yet given. These businesses will also take precautionary steps to protect the vulnerable and the general public, but we must get these folks back to work or their lives will be forever harmed.

Yesterday, I had a call with gym owners from every part of the state and your staff to discuss the gym owners' proposed plan for reopening. Your staff called it "well-thought out and streamlined." The call went well, but there was zero indication of any timeline for reopening. **I am asking that you open gyms on June 1st to provide our people the physical, and mental well-being that proper exercise offers.** The benefits of exercise go far beyond the physical benefits of weight loss, disease mitigation, and mental health. There are thousands of jobs and livelihoods on the line that may be forever impacted without the use of such a cogent plan that was presented to your team.

The plan, which is attached to this letter, outlines the precautions that can be taken. Such precautions include mandatory hygiene, effective usage of PPE, proper social distancing, and capacity limitations. One gym owner installed UV filter technology that kills viruses when they enter the ventilation system, which is something we would encourage.

The benefits of a healthy body are well-known. Gyms provide the resources and facilities for people to accomplish one goal: be healthier. Whether it is staving off diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, or cancer, the health benefits of exercise are nearly unending. The mental health benefits at a time of anxiety and loss for people could prove to be lifesaving as well; we must keep people mentally healthy. Gyms provide that release for people. **I implore you to open these facilities and utilize the plan presented to you to keep people safe and healthy.**

On May 5th I sent a letter to your office asking you to consider other parts of our lives to reopen. In that letter I stated, "*we must reopen our places of worship.*" Faith is also an essential component of a healthy, well-rounded life. The same protections for the vulnerable must be enacted to save lives, such as outdoor seating or spacing and proper sanitation, but to think that you can go into a "big-box" store and not be exposed to more risk is a farce.

People should not be punished for exercising their first amendment and God-given rights. While some may say you can do it from afar, every person has the right to practice their faith in the way that they see fit, not the way a government has decided. Please reopen places of worship immediately; we can enact precautionary measures so that people can practice the faith that drives so many of their lives.

Our region and state are becoming continuously agitated at the lack of movement on these and many other issues. We are even placing law enforcement in a precarious situation by having them enforce orders with which they may disagree.

Thank you for considering these crucial issues. I will continue to advocate for my community, my state, and my country. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my staff if we can be of assistance. **We must move forward.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Van Drew', followed by a long horizontal flourish that tapers to a point on the right.

Jeff Van Drew
Member of Congress (NJ-02)