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February 11, 2021

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

Chancellor Richard Carranza
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza,

We write today to request prompt, clear plans from health and education officials on the following: higher-risk sports, spring season youth sports league park permits, and re-opening of high schools and therefore PSAL sports. We are concerned about the effect that not having these programs has had on youth health and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on all New Yorkers, youth in particular are suffering from its effects on physical health, mental health, and social connectivity as many have stayed home from in-person school for months on end. Public health researchers believe that school closures have exacerbated obesity risk for students, who rely on school's structured physical activity and often sports participation. In addition, experts are warning of an increase in youth mental health issues, including depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use, in light of pandemic-fueled anxiety and social isolation.

Athletic activity offers physical, mental health, and social benefits that can mitigate these challenges youth are facing, which is why it is so important that the City issues immediate guidance on how to safely resume higher-risk, spring season, and PSAL sports. We know that COVID-19 prevention is paramount and can be logistically difficult, but we have the scientific knowledge to offer this guidance and we owe it to our youth to do so as they continue to wait months for vaccine distribution to unfold. As an example, in late January, right after Governor Cuomo announced municipalities could resume organized higher-risk sports, the Suffolk County Health Department issued guidance for resuming basketball, football, volleyball, and wrestling, and also permitted outdoor sports teams to use public parks. Our young athletes are still awaiting such guidance.

We encourage you to follow the lead of health and education officials elsewhere in the state and instruct the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Education, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and PSAL to create a plan and share it with schools, coaches, athletes, and families as soon as possible. It's time to do what we can to let kids be kids again.

Sincerely,

Andrew S. Gounardes
Member of Senate, 22nd District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J Brannan". The letters are cursive and connected.

Justin Brannan

NYC Councilmember, 43rd District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaime Will". The signature is cursive and ends with a long horizontal flourish.

Jaime Williams

NYS Assemblymember, 59th District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roxanne Persaud". The signature is cursive and clearly legible.

Roxanne Persaud

Member of Senate, 19th District