The Hon. Jenny Mikakos

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services

Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19

Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000

minister.health@health.vic.gov.au

Friday June 5th, 2020

Dear Hon. Jenny Mikakos

I am writing to you in my capacity as a dance studio owner and a member of Ausdance VIC, the peak body for Dance in Victoria. [delete if not appropriate for you].

Dance is the fourth most popular sport in Australia for children (AusPlay Focus 2018, p. 7). Dance studios employ performing artists as casuals who are part of the Australian Performing Arts industry, the first and hardest hit by lockdown measures. The Ausdance network’s national COVID-19 Impact Survey (14 April 2020) showed a **national financial loss** to the Australian dance industry of **$5.9million, 61% of which was borne by dance studios and educators.** In **Victoria,** the total financial loss to the dance industry was reported to be **$868K, with 63%** of that borne by dance educators, studio businesses and private dance training providers.

INSERT: Background/ Number of years of operation/ teaching, number of students/ current situation/ income loss/ expenses incurred due to changing enrolments/shifting to online delivery.

This financial loss is directly related to the pandemic as I shut down my studio to protect staff, students and communities.

At the time of writing this letter, Victoria is preparing its plan for the next stage of easing restrictions on 21 June. The information currently available combines dance businesses with gyms and sporting activities, proposing that physical recreation programs can be opened with up to 20 people allowed per separate enclosed space, subject to the four-square metre rule, with up to 10 people per group or activity.

I am greatly concerned about this restriction/rule and how it will affect my business.

***20 people allowed per separate enclosed space, subject to the four-square metre rule, with up to 10 people per group or activity.***

It is this restriction that will be straw on the camel’s back for my dance studio. To comply with your proposed guidelines, the dance studio would be effectively restricted to 10 participants per enclosed space, and not the 20 participants proposed from the 21st of June. It will make business operations for me, having already suffered so much loss, untenable.

I would like to respectfully point out that:

It is easy to implement social distancing in a dance class.

* Dance is a controlled, teacher-directed activity.
* In a dance class, there is usually one teacher who instructs a class of anywhere from 6 to 20 students.
* Dance classes follow a clear structure, progressing from warm up to more complex activities in a sequence that progresses in intensity and complexity.
* Unlike other sports we train students to move in unison and remain in formation. Participants progress through the movements at the same time, using the same music.
* It is not safe dance practise to split up the class and attempt to undertake different dance activities within the same enclosed space, as suggested in the 20-person rule.
* Dance teachers know how to instruct their students to maintain spaces and formations, and providing their studios are large enough to meet the space and density requirements, we should not be limited to only 10 students in a class.

Dance classes are not run like gymnasiums or sports groups.

* We are a non-contact sport.
* We can work with no equipment.
* If we use equipment (such as a dancing barre) students use it at one spot each class and we can wipe it over between classes.
* There is no sharing of equipment as in ball sports.
* We are able to implement cleaning between classes.

According to the Australian Institute of Sports most recent report Children’s Participation in Organised Physical Activity Outside of School Hours (2018), dance is the second highest activity for girls nationwide, second only to weekly swimming lessons and the fourth highest activity out of school hours for both boys and girls. Without the dance studio sector, these opportunities will not be available. Unchanged, this restriction will further negatively impact the physical and mental health of young people who have already had so much taken away from them. It will reduce the capacity of pre-professional dance students of many of our full-time courses, who may well be compared to elite athletes, to achieve their goals for many years to come.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee continues to note that there is very limited evidence of transmission between children; population screening overseas has shown very low incidence of positive cases in school-aged children,” (www.health.gov.au May 25, 2020). Therefore, there is no reason to keep private dance studios closed when the hospitality is allowed to open facilities for adults.

I respectfully request that the Victorian government acknowledges the dance sector and its contribution to our economy and the well-being of our children. In summary, I seek:

* That dance studios are not required to run two separate activities in the same enclosed space and that 20 people is the maximum number for each enclosed space, subject to the 4 square metre/density rule.
* That the Department of Health consult with Ausdance Vic, our dance industry peak body, to develop dance studio specific rules for Victoria
* That you direct Work Safe Victoria to work in partnership the dance industry to develop dance specific COVID19 protocols

I look forward to your correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

[Your signature – must be signed]

[Your name]

Address (You must include your voting address)

[Your dance studio name]