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February 19, 2021

Michael V. Drake, M.D., President of the University of California
Office of the President
University of California
1111 Franklin St., 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Joseph I. Castro, Chancellor of California State University
The California State University
Office of the Chancellor
401 Golden Shore
Long Beach, CA 90802

RE: COVID-19 guidelines for residents of student housing

Dear President Drake and Chancellor Castro:

The last year has presented unprecedented challenges for the institutions you lead. Students have been forced to contend with the novelties of distance learning and the pains of social isolation even as many already face housing and food insecurity.

These circumstances have taken a toll on student mental health. A study released by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in September of 2020 found 71 percent of students experienced increased stress and anxiety from the COVID-19 outbreak. 44 percent reported depressive thoughts as a result of the pandemic, with major contributors including loneliness, uncertainty, powerlessness, concerns related to academic performance, and overthinking. Eight percent of students reported suicidal thoughts.

In the same survey, 53 percent of students reported using outlets like physical exercise to cope with stress from the pandemic. Indeed, outdoor exercise is recommended both by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Governor's Office as a safe and compliant activity for stress relief. On Valentine's Day, Gavin and Jennifer Siebel Newsom celebrated by kayaking. We were therefore confused and alarmed to learn that thousands of California university students were facing restrictions that go far beyond anything imposed by the state and were barred from engaging in activities like solo outdoor exercise that the state has explicitly encouraged.

We sympathize with the challenges facing university leaders amid an array of continuously shifting state and local guidelines, and we appreciate that many regulations tie your hands. Yet imprisoning students in their dorm rooms is inhumane. Barring them from healthy outdoor activities that have no impact on viral transmission defies science and common sense. We respectfully ask that you work to allow the fullest extent of student activity pursuant to local or state guidelines and to advocate for policies consistent with student health and well-being in coordinating with local public health officials.

Sincerely,



Kevin Kiley
Assemblyman, 6th District



Steven Choi
Assemblyman, 68th District

CC:

Carol Christ, Chancellor, UC Berkeley
Gene Block, Chancellor, UC Los Angeles
Henry Yang, Chancellor, UC Santa Barbara
Pradeep Khosla, Chancellor, UC San Diego
Howard Gillman, Chancellor, UC Irvine
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Judy Sakaki, President, CSU Sonoma
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