

DSA

NEW YORK CITY

November 12th, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns. In response to the request to provide further clarification on the distinction of dance in a studio or institutional setting versus the activity in a fitness/gym setting, it is important to note that this precedent has already been set by the city and state. Studios outside of the New York City are operating without issue. Within the City, the guidance under education has allowed Alvin Ailey, City/State Schools and Universities, Juilliard, Joffrey Ballet and many (generally larger) institutions to perform the same exact activities that our institutions have always performed. In fact, we have worked with many of these institutions in assisting our mutual goal to educate and better serve our industry and community. It seems inequitable that our institutions are excluded from safely providing the same services.

With that in mind, it is important to recognize that dance is fundamentally the pursuit of artistry while fitness classes utilizes dance movements in the pursuit of an alternate form of exercise. To further the pursuit dance institutions, including dance studios, provide a wide range of educational, vocational, pre-professional and professional services to a diverse cross section of our city. We do so with the stated goal of providing avenues for them to grow as artists and find success professionally or otherwise. Services provided by dance studios range beyond in-studio instruction. Proper historical and cultural context is taught in a practical setting. It is pursued through performance and professional opportunities unique to dance studios.

In contrast, gyms and fitness centers use elements of dance in their activities to raise their heartrate and help customer reach their fitness goals. There are no services provided past this. Students taking a class at the gym are learning movement common to many dance forms which are being applied to known fitness techniques – not to techniques based in an artform. Those looking to become better dancers, and artists, attend our institutions – not gyms. The gym is providing a form of exercise that is packaged in a fun and engaging way. For example, Zumba – a popular form of dance fitness - characterizes itself as *“dance fitness party”* and *“exercise in disguise”* that provides *“A total workout, combining all elements of fitness – cardio, muscle conditioning, balance and flexibility, boosted energy and a serious dose of awesome each time you leave class.”*

You would never find any dance discipline characterized in this way. In fact, no dancer, artistic or education endeavor would be characterized in this way.

On a practical level, many distinctions exist between dance studios and gyms. Dance studios require a large, well ventilated open space to provide as much room as possible to move. Our studios have less surfaces to clean or disinfect. Dance studios do not need equipment to conduct their activities. Dance studios do not perform dance to raise their heartrate to the point where they lose control of their breathing. Dancers can wear masks while performing all activities unique to dance studios in a manner consistent with safety regulations. Gyms employ high intensity workouts that often require heavy breathing, loud vocalizations and moving until you reach muscle fatigue. The dance movements incorporated in these activities cannot be isolated out. However, a dance studio can restrict styles of dance deemed higher risk and modify class structures to maintain a safe space. Our classes are offered to a non-transient population of dancers with a fixed attendance, constant contact and professional supervision. This makes enforcement of regulations much easier. As having worked in a gym for over 10 years, I can tell you from experience enforcement in a gym is much harder given the nature of the activity and the non-familial relationship between a transient population of customers and the gym staff.

In the end, dancers have always considered themselves as artists. Dance studios have always been considered centers for education, culture and artist pursuits. The label of gym, based on mostly superficial similarities, is a difficult idea for those in the dance community to accept or understand. With your help, we endeavor to provide hope to an industry and city in crisis. In a time where we cannot hug, dance has never been more essential.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pavan Thimmaiah', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pavan Thimmaiah
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Director of PMT House of Dance
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