April 6, 2020

Governor Gretchen Whitmer

State of Michigan

P.O. Box 30013

Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Whitmer,

As the Michigan Chapter of the Pool and Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA), we are reaching out to you on behalf of the pool and hot tub industry of Michigan. We appreciate the leadership you and your office have shown to all Michiganders during this pandemic and understand the magnitude of issues you must attend to daily. The purpose of our letter is to request clarification on the State of Michigan’s position as it relates to the services our industry provides to this great state.

We agree with the difficult decisions you and your office have made for the protection of all Michiganders. We have been diligently spreading the word—not the virus—and uniting our industry during these difficult times. We have listened to your press conferences, read your executive orders, and considered all the implications to our industry. We agree that not all segments of our industry should be considered as an essential service. However, there are some services and functions that should be classified as essential for the protection of public health. If not, there will be serious negative health repercussions due to the unforeseen consequences of the existing executive orders.

Many of our member businesses have reached out to us in fear of repercussion from local law enforcement and government offices regarding the services they are providing. We desire to partner with you to address these concerns from our industry and provide clear designation of essential services. We consider the following services from our industry as essential:

* Pool and Hot Tub/Spa water maintenance services
* Limited functioning of pool/spa supply stores to supply water treatment chemicals, maintain safety and service/maintain equipment

Proper maintenance of a pool, hot tub, and/or spa is critical to public health. Our service providers balance the water chemistry and maintain the filtration, circulation and treatment equipment to ensure the water is properly sanitized and balanced. It is obvious that a poorly sanitized pool will lead to many different types of infections. It is less obvious, that improperly balanced water will lead to the off-gassing of dangerous disinfection byproducts. The resultant poor air quality, especially for indoor pools, will result in damage to mucus membranes and lung tissue.

Michigan is home to many indoor water facilities (8th in the country) in both public and residential sectors. The HVAC/Dehumidification systems are integrated with these indoor spaces and, as noted above, an integral component to maintain air quality of residential and hotel pools and spas. Spas and hot tubs are an important part of hydrotherapy and used for behavior augmentation in children with autism. They are an important regimen in treating multiple medical conditions.

We want to ensure the executive orders do not create unintended health and safety risks. Some pools and spas were in continuous use during winter, while others were winterized. With the arrival of spring weather, schools closed and everyone sequestered at home, now more than ever there is great pressure to open and utilize home pools and spas for healthy family recreation. As pools and spas are being opened for the season and more heavily utilized, water chemistry supplies are critically important. If pools are not treated properly, they become a breeding ground for pests and insects such as mosquitoes. Small children are also put at risk of drowning when proper pool and spa safety lessons are unavailable.

Competent homeowners are able to self-manage their pool opening and properly balance water chemistry; however, they require access to those chemicals. Others that rely upon a service may attempt to open or treat pools themselves, without the guidance and expertise of an industry professional. There are safety precautions and risks involved in these processes, and an untrained individual is unaware of the dangers related to improper mixing of chemicals which result in explosions, toxic gas exposure, burns, property damage and other health hazards and injuries.

These are not overstatements. We have seen these scenarios play out with single bodies of water throughout the country. If an entire industry is not allowed to perform its critical role in protection of public health and safety this will result in tens of thousands of unsafe pools and therapy centers. The risk of neglected water increases the chances of a legionella or cryptosporidium outbreak.

To reiterate, the classification of certain pool and spa industry services as being essential has already been recognized in other states. The servicing or opening of pools is completed by a single worker, who can easily employ social distancing protocols, with proper sanitation of tools and equipment such that compliance with guidelines can easily be achieved. Pool supply stores have the capability to accept internet and telephone orders and offer curbside pick-up methods for chemicals and equipment.

In closing, we do not believe in putting people in harm’s way. We want to clearly communicate to Michiganders the risk of doing nothing. We need to ensure you are getting clear and accurate information and that you are making logical decisions based on the best information provided by the experts in the field. We know that unfinished and untreated pools and hot tubs/spas will cause additional and unnecessary health and safety risks to the public. These public health risks will only add to the already taxed Michigan health systems. We strongly encourage you to re-evaluate and clearly restate executive orders to better protect Michiganders.

We are all in this together and our industry has services that are essential to maintaining public health. We are available for any questions you may have and appreciate your consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,

Sung Choe

President

PHTA Michigan Chapter