



# State of New Mexico

Michelle Lujan Grisham  
*Governor*

**May 25, 2020**

President Mark Emmert  
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)  
700 W. Washington Street  
P.O. Box 6222  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222

Dear President Emmert,

As COVID-19 was first spreading across the United States, the NCAA made the difficult and unfortunately correct decision to cancel winter and spring championship events – including the Division I men’s and women’s basketball tournaments – and I applaud you and your organization for your leadership on that matter. In hindsight, with all athletics across the country shuttered to some degree, it’s easy to forget how challenging it was to accept, at first, the thought that we wouldn’t have March Madness this year and to contemplate what that would mean for so many student athletes, coaches and their families. Additionally, the University of New Mexico was slated to host the Division I men’s and women’s indoor track and field championships. Canceling these events was the right step to take in order to protect public health and safety. Of course, long and difficult months stand between us and those initial moments, and I understand much of the world is evaluating how they might take measured steps back into some new normal, the NCAA included, and I am writing you to bring to your immediate attention an issue that has arisen at New Mexico State University, a Division I school in Las Cruces.

The New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico State University conducted a large-scale testing operation last week. More than 300 individuals were tested, including 80 student athletes and staff members of the university’s athletic department. This morning, I received the news that a total of 16 people tested positive for COVID-19. Of the positive tests, three were employees of the athletic department and six were student athletes.

We are learning new things about COVID-19 every day, but we can say with certainty that the virus does not always present symptoms for infected individuals. That was the case for nearly every individual that tested positive at New Mexico State University, including all six of the student athletes. My understanding is they are all well, but I am concerned with the incidence of positivity in a group located in a part of the state where we are currently seeing an increased rate of transmission.

It has come to my attention that the NCAA's Division I Council voted last week to allow student athletes to participate in on-campus voluntary athletics activities beginning June 1, 2020. I know that traditionally football and basketball teams have full participation in the summer months leading up to the start of school in order for student athletes to prepare for their seasons well in advance. New Mexico State University has agreed to prohibit countable required activities through June 30 for these two sports; however, many student athletes from across the nation have already returned to their school campus communities to begin training, including Las Cruces.

What happened at New Mexico State University is indicative of what could happen at colleges, universities, classrooms and athletic programs across the country. The way this virus spreads, those are unlikely to be isolated incidents, and the tight-knit communities in which these schools operate could be at risk. So I am urging your organization to evaluate and establish firm protocols for COVID-19, including the closure of athletic facilities when necessary in addition to proper isolation and the strict social distancing of coaches, staff and student athletes on and off campus for the remainder of the summer months.

COVID-19 continues to menace our nation in states across the country, and college campuses – and athletes and staff on those campuses – are not immune. It's critical your organization expeditiously establish new policies to support the student-athlete experience in a COVID-positive world so that we might return to some safe and balanced new normal – where we continue to fight this awful virus with all the tools we know to work and we can permit some safe and limited athletic activity for the 460,000 student athletes across our nation.

With June 1 rapidly approaching, the NCAA must make prompt decisions centered on mechanisms that will protect the well-being of student athletes, coaches, spectators and the campus community at large. The State of New Mexico is doing everything we can to fight COVID-19 and I look forward to your assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Lujan Grisham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Governor