

USA Climbing
P.O. Box 4043
Salt Lake City, UT 84110
Attn: Board of Directors

December 28, 2023

To the USA Climbing Board of Directors:

Competition climbing in the US was born from climbing gyms. The organizations that merged to become USA Climbing originated in the minds of and were operated by climbing gym owners. USA Climbing also began as an organization dedicated to domestic *youth* competition.

Today, privately-owned commercial climbing gyms host nearly every USAC-sanctioned climbing competition, from the hundreds of youth competitions (260 gyms across 44 states in 2023) all the way through the Championship level events. Every current, dues-paying USA Climbing member practices, trains, or works at an indoor climbing facility. Nearly every future dues-paying member will discover climbing at an indoor climbing facility. In short, USA Climbing's financial structure and viability is entirely dependent on privately-owned commercial climbing gyms, the youth teams and families we grow and foster, and the competitions of all sizes that we host.

However, since the adoption of the Olympic movement, USA Climbing has neglected the 99% of athletes that do not compete on the world stage. Domestic youth competitions, as a whole, have diminished in quality and support from USA Climbing and national level adult events have also seen a major drop-off in terms of scale and importance. Even though USA Climbing's stated mission is to "[s]upport the wellbeing, development, and competitive excellence of our athletes as we advance the accessibility and growth of the climbing community nationwide," you have taken advantage of our sense of responsibility to our communities.

Meanwhile, USA Climbing has made hosting competitions more and more onerous, operationally and financially, offering little to no support, for gyms, their staff, and the hundreds of families and volunteers. While revenue from member dues and competition fees has skyrocketed, USA Climbing has not invested this financial growth back into the 99% of athletes, their experiences, or the gyms that host their competitions. While the elite level athletes have started to receive appropriate support, the fundamentals of the sport are sacrificed.

Make no mistake, we support:

- Competition climbing in the US, athletes of all levels, and the continued growth of the quality and experience for athletes and organizers alike;
- The enormous and dedicated community of volunteers, parents, officials, and gym staff who are essential to climbing competitions;
- *And* the creation of a modern, dedicated Training Center for our elite athletes that fosters their performance on the international stage.

We are deeply troubled by USA Climbing's Salt Lake City gym project. Our current understanding of the project is that it originated as an effort to secure a dedicated, modern location for our elite athletes to gather and train; and provide a potentially permanent, purpose-built home for certain USA Climbing events. However, following what are rumored to be years of clandestine discussions and unsanctioned lobbying without the solicitation of input or

buy-in from its constituents, USA Climbing now wants to construct and *operate* a facility rivaling in size and scope the largest privately-owned commercial climbing gyms in the US. This proposed project is based on the backing of millions of dollars of public funding, and with the express purpose of operating commercially in direct competition with the privately-owned climbing gyms in Salt Lake City. None of this is remotely specified in the current 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, nor explicitly authorized anywhere in USA Climbing Board of Directors' official minutes.

From our perspective, no effort was made to solicit the input or obtain the buy-in of any of its constituents. To date, we are unaware of any strategic work or planning that demonstrates or explains how the training center conceived as a major commercial climbing gym furthers USA Climbing's mission and responsibilities. To the contrary, from what we are aware of, USA Climbing's Board of Directors and its leadership team are moving as fast as possible without giving sufficient consideration to the major risks such an undertaking could create—both for the project itself and USA Climbing's ability to fulfill its current responsibilities.

To be abundantly clear: **We oppose the USA Climbing gym project as currently envisioned.** We cannot and do not support a poorly vetted, unilaterally executed decision by USA Climbing to radically shift its direction from its core mission to undertake a commercial endeavor that conflicts with USA Climbing's own non-profit structure, history of grassroots development of competition climbing, and cooperation with the national commercial climbing gym community.

Furthermore, our concern is not just about the current Salt Lake City gym project. How USA Climbing's Board and leadership has handled the recent transgender policy and now the gym project encapsulates what we have observed to be a growing inability of USA Climbing leadership to manage its operations, communicate with and serve its constituents, and carry out its core mission and primary responsibilities – all with an absence of accountability.

We request that USA Climbing pause any further development of the Salt Lake Center gym project as currently conceived until:

- USA Climbing undertakes open, good faith, transparent discussions with all of its stakeholders, including an open comment period on any final plan before it is put into motion;
- USA Climbing reconfigures its strategic plan so that, regardless of the training center decision, it commits to a timeline for improving and ultimately making its fulfillment of youth climbing competition responsibilities financially and operationally self-sufficient;
- and USA Climbing commits to a timeline for increasing the meaningful representation of climbing gym owners on its Board of Directors.

We plan to fulfill our existing commitments to host USA Climbing competitions, including, where applicable, the upcoming bouldering Regional and Divisional competitions. However, should USA Climbing continue its pursuit of the gym project as currently envisioned without meaningful engagement with stakeholders, we will discontinue hosting all USA Climbing competitions beyond those to which we have already committed. We will encourage gyms nationwide to do the same. We will also engage with other USA Climbing constituents, encouraging them to directly voice their opposition to USA Climbing's direction and outline their own specific concerns.

We have spent years speaking to USA Climbing leaders reasonably and respectfully about our concerns, while conscientiously supporting our communities and competition climbing. We feel that our words have been falling on deaf ears, or worse, have been actively ignored and dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant. We did not make the decision to write this letter cavalierly.

We are aware that you have seen an earlier draft version of this letter. We have also read and reviewed CEO Marc Norman’s recent letter to climbing gym owners. However, our concerns and requests remain unchanged. We believe the USA Climbing Board has thoughtful, well-intentioned individuals who care deeply about our sport—just as we do. Mr. Norman’s letter notwithstanding, you still have not asked us or others about the fundamental questions. “What do we need? What does our community want? What problem are we trying to solve?”

What we want is genuine dialogue directly with the Board on these questions generally; and the state of relations between gym owners and USA Climbing and the gym project, specifically. To be very clear, we want the Board of Directors--whether as a whole body or with a designated subset of Board members--to initiate communication directly with gym owners as a first step to structural changes that make these lines of communication permanent and meaningful.

Our words come from a place of genuine care and urgency. We are aware that there is currently a USA Climbing Board meeting scheduled for January 3rd, where the Board plans to discuss and approve what USA Climbing plans to present to the Salt Lake City Redevelopment Agency on January 9th for the purpose of receiving a site for the gym project. We want to believe we have spoken up in time.

We are hopeful that this letter gets your attention, so that we can actually start talking to one another about how to work to repair and improve this endeavor of which we are all a part. We hope you reach out to us soon.

You may contact us, collectively, care of Ian McIntosh (ianmcintosh@mesarim.com), Chris Danielson (cdanielson@threadclimbing.com), and Wes Shih (wes2@sender.one).

Respectfully,

<p><i>Robyn Raboutou</i> ABC Kids Climbing 1 Location, Region 42</p>	<p><i>Craig Burzynski</i> Adventure Rock 3 Locations, Region 61</p>
<p><i>Deborah Smith</i> Alta Climbing 2 Locations, Region 32</p>	<p><i>Jon Lachelt</i> Ascent Studio 1 Location, Region 42</p>
<p><i>Aaron Gilmore</i> Ascend 4 Locations, Region 62</p>	<p><i>Kevin Bains</i> Boulder Rock Club 1 Location, Region 42</p>
<p><i>Aaron Stevens</i> Climb Iowa 2 Locations, Region 61</p>	<p><i>Glenn Van Sipma</i> Climb On 1 Location, Region 61</p>

<p><i>Ian Anderson</i> Climb So III 2 Locations, Region 52</p>	<p><i>Kim Rank</i> The Crag 2 Locations, Region 52</p>
<p><i>Jon Shepard</i> First Ascent Climbing 7 Locations, Regions 61, 62</p>	<p><i>Dustin Buckthal</i> The Front Climbing 3 Locations, Region 22</p>
<p><i>Jason Haas</i> G1 Climbing 1 Location, Region 42</p>	<p><i>Don Campbell</i> Gemstone Climbing 1 Location, Region 22</p>
<p><i>Shawn Watson</i> High Point Climbing 7 Locations, Regions 52, 62, 71</p>	<p><i>Ian McIntosh</i> Mesa Rim Climbing 5 Locations, Regions 21, 31, 51</p>
<p><i>Kristin Horowitz</i> The Pad Climbing 4 Locations, Regions 21, 31, 82</p>	<p><i>Wes Shih</i> Sender One Climbing 3 Locations, Regions 31, 32</p>
<p><i>Bryan Pletta</i> Stone Age Climbing 2 Locations, Region 41</p>	<p><i>Jeffery Bowling</i> Touchstone Climbing 16 Locations, Regions 21, 31</p>
<p><i>Jason Noble</i> Vertical Endeavors 6 Locations, Region 61</p>	<p><i>Darrell Gschwendtner</i> Whetstone Climbing 1 Location, Region 42</p>