



THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR DOMENIC J. SARNO
HOME OF THE BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

February 25, 2026

John Doleva
President and CEO
Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame
1000 Hall of Fame Ave
Springfield, MA 01105

Dear President and CEO Doleva:

John

I am very disappointed to have been recently made aware of secret discussions between yourself and the former Massachusetts Convention Center Authority Executive Director Marcel Vernon, Sr. about potentially relocating the Hoophall tournaments from Springfield – the birthplace of basketball, to Boston. I am also upset upon hearing that you tried to keep the purpose of this meeting between you and Mr. Vernon a secret, not only from Springfield but from the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, when the issues you claim to be hindering this event have never been discussed with my administration, our state delegation, or tourism and hospitality officials.

I am concerned that you were taking covert actions to try and hijack this event to Boston and just like what the Hall of Fame did to the Mayflower Marathon, you were going to leave the City of Springfield, the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, Springfield College, and all of our community partners out of the discussion until executive decisions were already made to relocate this multimillion-dollar event out of Springfield. This action would have a significant negative impact upon our local tourism revenue and its associated economic opportunities to our hotels and businesses.

I am left believing that you, in your capacity as President and CEO of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and as a board member to the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau do not have Springfield and Western Massachusetts in our best interest.

That you are actively looking to remove marquee events that generate millions of dollars of positive development and business into our local economy is troubling. This seems to go directly against what we are collectively working for; to promote and develop Springfield and Western Massachusetts as a visitor destination to drive economic vitality, enhance tourism, and promote the quality of life in our communities.

Your comments that this is a call to action and that officials are now ready to have a substantive discussion about meeting these needs of more hotel rooms and gym space is disingenuous and insulting.

At no time have you brought these concerns to my attention or to the attention of my Chief Development Officer Tim Sheehan. If you had brought these concerns to my administration's attention, we could have worked together along with our community stakeholders and businesses to find a plausible and mutually beneficial solution.

As you well know, Springfield and the greater Springfield area have plenty of hotel rooms available to meet the demand for the 500 hotel rooms you claim are needed. There are approximately over 6,400 hotel rooms in the greater Springfield area, with roughly 2,400 hotel rooms in Springfield alone.

As for the need for additional gym space, Western New England University and our Springfield Public Schools, including Duggan Academy and some of our middle schools, were made available to help accommodate the demand. If additional gym space is needed, I am confident that we could find the space to meet the needs for this signature event that generates \$11 to \$12 million for our community.

Within the City of Springfield, our Springfield Public School facilities have ample gym space that could potentially be made available, with some schools being able to provide multiple basketball courts. There are 14 schools alone that have over 5,500 square feet of gym space, with the largest being Central High School which has approximately 13,860 sq ft of space.

In addition, the MassMutual Center, local colleges, and community centers could potentially serve as overflow sites. There is also the Big E Fairgrounds – where the annual Hooplandia event is held, and various other locations in the greater Springfield area that could accommodate the increasing numbers of the Hoophall Classic thus keeping this wonderful event and all the positive economic spinoff it creates here in the greater Springfield area.

My administration, through the Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPEC), has also put out an RFP for a sports complex and we continue to explore and welcome any discussions with potential developers.

To put it bluntly, you dropped the ball. It is especially puzzling, since you are a board member of the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, whose main mission is to attract events and tourism to the greater Springfield area, you were working counter to that mission to move a premier event out of the area.

My administration will continue to work with the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, and all of our community stakeholders to make sure that the Hoophall tournaments stay in Springfield, the birthplace of basketball. Anything less is unacceptable.

Please reach out to my Chief Development Officer Tim Sheehan, as he will be more than happy to work with you to address the issues you stated so that this event continues to be a tremendous success and a major economic boom not just for Springfield but for Western Massachusetts too.

Respectfully,



Domenic J. Sarno
Mayor

CC:

Board of Governors, Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame
Mary Kay Wydra, President, Greater Springfield Convention & Visitor Bureau
Eugene Cassidy, President and CEO, Eastern States Exposition
Xiomara DeLobato, VP & Chief of Staff, Economic Development Council
Governor Maura Healey
Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll
Springfield State Delegation
John Barros, Interim Executive Director, MCCA
Tim Sheehan, CDO, City of Springfield