



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## 2020 SPECIAL OLYMPICS PENNSYLVANIA SUMMER GAMES AT PENN STATE CANCELLED DUE TO CORONAVIRUS, VIRTUAL GAMES ANNOUNCED

**(NORRISTOWN, PA, April 16, 2020)** – Today Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) and Penn State University (PSU) announced that the 2020 Summer Games, scheduled to take place from Thursday, June 11 to Saturday, June 13 in State College, PA, are cancelled due to concerns related to the coronavirus. In addition, the 10<sup>th</sup> annual “Be a Fan” Torch Run that precedes Summer Games is cancelled this year. Instead, SOPA is working with its statewide athlete leaders, PSU, the Summer Games volunteer committee, Law Enforcement Torch Run leaders, and key sponsors to plan a “Virtual Summer Games” that will take place during the same timeframe. More details will be shared in the near future.

Summer Games, SOPA’s largest annual statewide competition, typically brings more than 2,000 athletes, 750 coaches, and more than 1,000 enthusiastic volunteers from across the state together on Penn State University’s main campus for 3 days of competition in 8 sports (swimming, athletics, basketball, equestrian, golf, gymnastics, softball and tennis). A dedicated Summer Games volunteer committee works year-round planning for the Games.

In addition to sports competitions, Summer Games traditionally include a spectacular Opening Ceremonies at Pegula Ice Arena featuring the lighting of the Olympic Cauldron, a Victory Dance and Sport Fest celebration, an “Olympic Village” with fun activities to keep athletes engaged and entertained between competitions, and Healthy Athletes programs. The Healthy Athletes programs provide health services and education to Special Olympics athletes completely free of charge. Health promotion, physical therapy, eye, ear, dental, and podiatry screenings are typically offered.

The “Be a Fan” Torch Run is a 3-day, 150-mile run from Pittsburgh to State College featuring over 500 runners representing more than 50 law enforcement teams that are accompanied or cheered on by local Special Olympics athletes. Energy Transfer is SOPA’s premier “Guardians of the Flame” Law Enforcement Torch Run partner.

“While it is heartbreaking to announce this decision to cancel the Torch Run and Summer Games,” said Matthew Aaron, SOPA’s President and CEO, “our hope is to capture the spirit of

### Special Olympics Pennsylvania

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our athletes and volunteers via the Virtual Summer Games. The athletes of Special Olympics Pennsylvania and our coaches, families, Law Enforcement Torch Run partners, sponsors, and volunteers are an amazing and resilient group. We will come through this crisis stronger and more unified than ever!”

This year would have marked the 33<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year that Penn State University hosted Summer Games. Both organizations are firmly committed to bringing the Summer Games back to State College in 2021.

“Penn State University and our entire community always look forward to hosting the amazing Special Olympics athletes and their coaches, volunteers and guests each June. We will miss them and their families this year. But, we all look forward to the day when we can welcome everyone back to campus again.” said Eric Barron, President of Penn State University.

Sponsored by Sheetz, Inc., a key SOPA statewide corporate partner for nearly 30 years, Summer Games are also financed in part by a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Community and Economic Development.

### ***About Special Olympics Pennsylvania***

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides year-round training and competition in 21 Olympic-type sports to more than 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities. For 50 years, SOPA and its 54 local programs have used the power of sports to transform the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and unite everyone by fostering community and building a more acceptable and civil society. SOPA is much more than a sports organization. Through its Athlete Leadership Programs, athletes assume meaningful leadership roles, influence change within the Special Olympics movement and take on roles as Global Messengers (trained as public speakers for Special Olympics), athlete representatives, coaches, board members and more. SOPA also addresses major challenges facing its athletes including healthcare. Its Healthy Athletes program offers athletes free health screenings in the form of eye, ear, dental and podiatry assessments. Athletes are also taught how to live active lifestyles, eat healthy and more. Additionally, SOPA strives to create a unified world by promoting inclusion, uniting communities, and changing attitude. Through Unified Sports, SOPA brings together individuals with and without intellectual disabilities as equal teammates in training and competition, which promotes respect and acceptance, and facilitates meaningful relationships between people of all abilities. For more information about how you can join “The Inclusion Revolution,” visit [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org).

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