Yoga Alliance Actively Supports California Court Rulings

Arlington, Va. (April 6, 2015) – Yoga Alliance, the largest international nonprofit association representing the yoga community, was actively involved in ensuring that the California court of appeal had the information and comments needed to uphold the teaching of yoga in the Encinitas school district in San Diego County. Documents and comments provided by Yoga Alliance supported the court’s decision, which rejected the argument that the school district’s yoga program amounted to “state-sponsored religion.”

The appellate court on Friday, April 3, 2015 unanimously upheld the yoga program offered by Encinitas school district in San Diego County. "While the practice of yoga may be religious in some contexts, yoga classes as taught in the district are, as the trial court determined, 'devoid of any religious, mystical, or spiritual trappings,'" the court wrote in a 3-0 opinion. The Encinitas school district comprises nine elementary schools and serves approximately 5,600 children in kindergarten through sixth grade.

Although not a party to the lawsuit, Yoga Alliance actively participated in the proceedings at both the trial and appellate proceedings. Yoga Alliance board of directors Chairman Brandon Hartsell submitted written testimony in the trial proceedings, and the court of appeal specifically identified Hartsell’s testimony as part of the “abundant evidence that contemporary yoga is commonly practiced in the United States for reasons that are entirely distinct from religious ideology.”

“With a breadth of expertise and research at our fingertips, Yoga Alliance is well-positioned to advocate for the yoga community, as well as facilitate legislative and judicial processes in meaningful ways,” said Yoga Alliance COO Barbara Dobberthien.

Yoga Alliance also filed an amicus curiae (“friend of the court”) brief in October 2014 supporting the yoga program, arguing the trial court’s decision should be affirmed not only because the school district’s yoga program is not religious, but also because yoga itself is not inherently religious. The appellate opinion echoed Yoga Alliance’s position, stating, “It is clear that while yoga may be practiced for religious reasons, it cannot be said to be inherently religious or overtly sectarian.”

The appellate opinion, Sedlock v. Baird, case no. D064888 (Cal. App. 4th Dist.), is available here. Yoga Alliance’s amicus brief is available here.

About Yoga Alliance®
Yoga Alliance is the largest international nonprofit association promoting and supporting the diversity and integrity of the teaching of yoga. Yoga Alliance educates the public on the value and credibility of voluntary registration with Yoga Alliance Registry, and upholds the worldwide growth of yoga through education and community.