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Sedlock v. Baird (Yoga trial): Reaction to Statement of Decision.

SAN DIEGO, CA — According to the Yoga in Theory and Practice Group of the America Academy of Religion, contemporary yoga is “pervasively spiritual and religious.” And, as petitioners’ powerful expert witness Religious Studies Professor Candy Gunther Brown (Ph.D. Harvard) also explained during her trial testimony, Ashtanga yoga is one of the more religious forms of yoga practiced in the United States.

“Religious freedom is one of the brightest stars in the constellation of liberties we enjoy as American citizens,” declared attorney Dean Broyles, President of the National Center for Law & Policy and lead attorney for the petitioners’. “James Madison, hailed as the father of the U.S. Constitution and champion and author of the Bill of Rights, wrote: ‘That Religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and, therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience’ If we value our God-given rights and liberties as citizens, we must vigilantly fight for and defend religious freedom from all encroachments of the state and must never allow the government to pick religious winners and losers.”

EUSD’s Ashtanga yoga program clearly violates U.S. and California constitutional protections forbidding the governmental establishment of religion because it: (1) advances and endorses yoga, which clearly involves Hindu religious beliefs and practices, and inhibits or discriminates against other religions, including Christianity, and, (2) excessively entangles the government with religion, by making the district a co-participant in the Jois Foundation’s religious goals of hiring religious teachers, developing a religious yoga-based curriculum, and marketing the program to public schools nationwide. The law is very clear: EUSD must end its yoga program.

“I recognize that most people in America do not view or identify yoga as a religious practice. However, such opinions are not based on fact, but are based primarily upon a lack of knowledge or ignorance about yoga and its relationship with Hinduism,” stated Dean Broyles. “This case is not about whether yoga has health benefits, whether individuals may personally practice yoga, or whether individuals like or enjoy yoga. This case is simply about whether public schools may entangle themselves with religious organizations like the Jois Foundation and use the state’s coercive powers to promote a particular religious orthodoxy or religious agenda to young and impressionable school children. Religious freedom is not for sale to the highest bidder.”

“All the parties understand the far reaching impacts of this case. We are pleased and thankful that Judge John Meyer gave this case the time and attention that it needed and deserved. No matter who has won or lost today at this level, one thing is clear: this is not the end of the road for this case or the last word regarding the fate of yoga in public education—this is only the beginning.”

The lawsuit is the result of the Encinitas Union School District’s (EUSD) decision to accept \$533,720 from the K.P. Jois Foundation in exchange for providing the religiously-motivated organization access to the district’s young and impressionable students in order to test, prove, and nationally promote the feasibility of Jois’ “health and wellness” **Ashtanga yoga** curriculum. The foundation’s reason for existence is to spread the “gospel” of Ashtanga yoga by targeting young children in public schools. The lawsuit does not seek money damages, but rather seeks to suspend EUSD’s religiously divisive Ashtanga yoga program and restore traditional physical education to the district.

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