Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of The Irish Federation of Yoga Teachers and myself, Lisa Wilkinson Director of The elbowroom in Dublin 7. Our objective is to educate the Irish public and government in regards how yoga supports health in an industry worth over $84 billion and £926 million in the UK. Whilst relatively new in Ireland, there is a huge potential for growth.

The last 9 months have been a truly trying time for the nation and many sacrifices and adjustments have been made for the common good. As a group, our members have supported government decisions whilst doing their uppermost to protect the health and wellbeing of our clients.

What has become most apparent to us in this time, is the lack of insight, knowledge and education that the government has in regards to the practice of Yoga. It may be the case that the legacy of outdated ideas misguides opinions about Yoga in Irish society and the Oireachtas.

Whatever the reason, we would like to take this opportunity to put the plain facts at your disposal. In order for you to reach a more educated understanding of the scientific and researched benefits of Yoga and Meditation for both physical and mental wellbeing, we implore you to consider and study this research.

Furthermore, our organisation is available to meet with you to demonstrate how yoga should be a cornerstone of the mainstream support to all people for emotional and mental health.

Our counterparts across the pond in the UK are steps ahead of us in this regard with several initiatives and publications. Including: an all parliamentary group working together in order to improve the health and wellbeing of the UK population; Recommendations for Yoga from the NHS; NHS staff yoga programs

I have linked here a white paper complete with 22 separate studies proving the benefits of yoga. (see Appendix A) These are only a small selection from the many controlled trials available.

We recognise that Ireland is a proud sporting nation. And acknowledge that rightly, sport has excellent support from government.

However, Yoga is not sport Minister. It is something entirely different from either sport or exercise. It is a comprehensive wellbeing system. And now more than ever, we need a simple, effective and reliable solution to tackle the overwhelming mental health issues that will plague Ireland whilst dealing with and in the aftermath of COVID.

Yoga studios and teachers have been forced to close many times since March. Many have closed down permanently. We would now ask you to show support to our industry for the sake of our clients continued health and wellbeing. We need you to:

• Acknowledge the physical health benefits of Yoga

• Acknowledge the profound mental health benefits of Yoga and Meditation.

• Link us with the HSE educate them how yoga supports health

• Roll out a simple step by step guide via the HSE to promote a simple home yoga & Meditation practice

• Recognise that Yoga is not a sport or just a physical exercise

• Introduce into the program for government yoga in schools to help children reduce their anxiety and learn vital tools in supporting their mental health

• Review our COVID safety standard operating procedures and include us in level 3 as a service essential for protecting our client’s health.

• Put supports in place to ensure the yoga industry is not another victim of COVID.

• Form a joint committee exploring the opportunities available and the breadth of knowledge we have accumulated in Ireland over the past 25 years.

To support this initiative our members have signed up to a strict set of standard operating procedures developed in response to a full risk assessment for the practice of yoga in groups indoors. Please see the documentation linked in the footnote.

We would be grateful if you would review the evidence presented here and revert back to our group as to what your party can do to implement these simple health measures.

Kind Regards

Lisa Wilkinson

Co-Chair of the Federation of Irish Yoga Teachers.

The Irish Federation of Yoga Teachers

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Appendix A - How Yoga Supports Health - Research White Paper

**White Paper: How Yoga Supports Health**

Yoga is the mind–body medicine comprised of a wide range of techniques including (mainly) physical movement, breathwork and meditation. Because of its health-related benefits, yoga has been an integral part of the oldest and indigenous medical system practiced in India (ie. Ayurveda). In its various forms and for various reasons (physical and mental health-related benefits), yoga is now practiced worldwide by millions of people irrespective of their age, gender, race, religion, and nationality. Since 2011, about 200 titles are added each year on the use of yoga in different medical conditions. The salient features of yoga as a therapeutic tool are that it is simple and easy to administer; is cost-effective; and could be administered to one person or to a group in the clinical settings or at home. In contrast to pharmacological interventions, it is non-toxic and non-invasive. It may be used by patients, medical professionals, and caregivers for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. An important point to note is that yoga also enriches the emotional needs of patients that are not met by conventional therapy.

During the last five decades, there has been a worldwide interest in yoga practices in medical circles around the world. Following its global reach many doctors and scientists became interested and started studying the effects of yoga practice on various medical conditions.

The below findings are based on the research made by doctors and scientists worldwide. They provide proven, evidence based benefits of yoga for physical and mental health and overall wellbeing. This is by no means an exhaustive list but it gives an indication of the potential use of yoga to prevent and cure various health conditions:

**\*yoga for mental health:** yoga is extensively used as a main treatment or adjunctive treatment for a variety of mental health disorders. It can reduce symptoms of stress or generalized anxiety, schizophrenia, depression, PTSD (including survivors of natural disasters, women with a history of domestic-abuse or sexual trauma, combat-related trauma), suicidal behaviour and addiction (4;5;8;10;22)

\***yoga for brain health:** yoga practice can positively impact brain health mitigating the risk of age-related and neurodegenerative diseases. (2;16)

**\*yoga for chronic pain:** yoga practice has a prominent effect on psychological aspects on living with chronic pain, reducing associated depression and improving quality of life. (6)

**\*yoga for stress:** yoga is positively related both to stress reduction and coping with stress. (9)

**\*yoga for low back pain**: yoga practice is effective in treating and preventing chronic low back pain by improving function, decreasing pain and improving quality of life of people affected by it. (3;22)

**\*yoga for preventing inflammation and fibrosis:** yoga practice reduces local connective tissue inflammation and fibrosis. (12)

**\*yoga for bone health:** yoga practice improves bone mineral density in spine, hips, and legs. (15)

**\*yoga for improving overall quality of life:** yoga improves energy levels, increases feeling of happiness, has positive effect on social relationships, sleep, and contributes to healthy weight control (17;18;20)

**\*yoga for self-regulation, mood control and resilience:** yoga practice facilitates self-regulation and resilience in the face of stress-related physical or emotional challenges. (19)

**\*yoga for immunity:** certain meditation, yoga postures, and breathing practices may be effective adjunctive means of treating and/or preventing SARS-CoV-2 infection by reducing stress, enhancing function of the immune system and counteracting some forms of infectious challenges like pandemic-associated negative inflammatory and psychosocial stress factors. (21)

**\*yoga for the cardiovascular conditions:** yoga proves to help treating heart conditions, reducing cardiovascular risk factors and high blood pressure (hypertension). (7;14;22)

**\*yoga for asthma:** for asthma, the breathing component of yoga has been linked to improvements in lung function and asthma symptoms. (22)

**\*yoga for HIV:** yoga is used effectively as a treatment for people with HIV. (22)

**\*yoga for IBS:** yoga proves to help treating irritable bowel syndrome. (22)

\***yoga for cancer care:** yoga interventions are beneficial in improving the adverse symptoms in cancer patients – caused either by the disease or its treatment (such as fatigue). Yoga improves the physical and psychological symptoms, quality of life, and markers of immunity of the cancer patients. (1;11;13;22)

**\*yoga for the mind:** in cases where yoga does not offer significant relief from physical disease, it can still offer some measure of relief from mental suffering. In this sense, yoga can provide a different way of looking at pain, which in itself can potentially alleviate suffering. (22)

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