



FAVORABLE

SB-768/HB819

Health and Wellness Standards - Correctional Facilities and Health Care Facilities

February 25, 2020

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Plant-Based Advocates Coalition (MPAC) we submit this letter of support of SB-768/HB819. The Maryland Plant-Based Advocates Coalition is made up of the above listed organizations which includes, plant-based restaurant owners, plant-based trade associations, plant-based education and training organization, community criminal justice and health reform organizations in Maryland. Our mission is to advocate for: 1) the increase of whole plant-based food nutrition education in K-12, universities and community organizations, 2.) greater access to healthy whole plant-based foods, particularly in Maryland’s food deserts and communities that suffer disproportionately from chronic degenerative diseases, 3) industry protections for plant-based food manufacturers, retailers, and educators.

In a recent Sept. 16-30 Gallup poll of U.S. adults, it was reported that one in four Americans (23%) report eating less meat in the past year (2019) than they had previously. The biggest factor in reducing meat consumption is health concerns -- nine in 10 say it is a major (70%) factor. After health, environmental concerns are the next most prominent factor leading to reduced meat consumption -- seven in 10 say concerns about the environment are behind their avoidance of meat (49% say it is a major reason, and 21% a minor one). The report also indicated that the momentum behind plant-based meat options may reflect that reduction in meat intake -- and possibly even accelerate it.¹

¹ Jan 28, 2020 Gallup Poll - <https://news.gallup.com/poll/282779/nearly-one-four-cut-back-eating-meat.aspx>

The Gallop poll also reported that African American made the greatest reduction in meat (31%) and white (19%). Recent SPINS data commissioned by The Good Food Institute showed that U.S. retail sales of plant-based foods that directly replace animal products have grown 31% over the two-year period to reach nearly \$4.5 billion as of July 2019.²

As of January 30, 2019, there are over nine (9) 100% plant-based restaurants in Baltimore City, all owned by African Americans. Baltimore was rated one of the top vegan friendly cities in the country. It is due to these trends in consumer eating habits, that there has been a tremendous growth of plant-based restaurants in Baltimore.

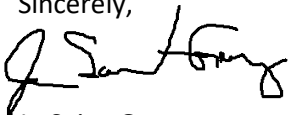
While these measurable shifts in eating habits are promising for improving the health of Maryland residents, Maryland inmates and vulnerable patients in hospitals should be guaranteed access to whole plant-based meals. With 70% of Maryland's inmate population are African Americans and African Americans in Maryland suffer disproportionately from degenerative diseases like heart disease and diabetes related complications, SB-768/HB819 is disparately needed for these vulnerable residents.

MPAC supports SB-768/HB-819 because of its strong mandate for providing access to plant-based foods to inmates and patients. By directing the Secretary of Health to establish minimum standards for the healthfulness of foods served in Maryland's correctional and healthcare facilities, this bill provides an opportunity to ensure that meals meet evidence-based criteria to support health, rather than undermine it.

Also, the bills education and training component is another aspect of the bill that MPAC supports, as it addresses the need for medical providers who are up to date with the food trends in the market so health care delivery is not only cost effective but yields outcomes that can lead to reduction of chronic degenerative diseases within Maryland minority communities.

Passing this bill represents a key step toward supporting the health of Maryland's inmates and patients through whole plant-based food.

Sincerely,



Jo Saint-George
Coalition Representative
Director Legislative Affairs

² Forbes – Jan. 19, 2020 - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/douglasyu/2020/01/19/plant-based-foods-are-hot-now-they-just-got-hotter/#7e32eed5214c>