

HB1421/SB0911

Testimony

Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Dr. Gopi Vijaya, and I am Physicist by background and I have served as the scientific and legislative advisor for grassroots organizations in Utah for several years. I would like to speak in strong support of HB1421.

Many of you may know of the recent Federal rules regarding the labeling of food that took effect in 2022. Based on the clear necessity for labeling that was perceived by the Federal government, they have asked manufacturers to label everything artificially modified food as “bioengineered”, even allowing the use of QR codes. What you may *not* know about is how this rule is has been tied up in litigation, and it immediately was found to be confusing and discriminatory for those without a smartphone. Not only that, the federal law does not address a different but actual need that is urgently pressing on us today: a way to inform the public that their food can have components in them that are created using new technologies that can affect gene expression. Please note that the bill in front of you today is not about medical therapy, but about the food we consume day after day, which allows for any such genetic effect to multiply and accumulate.

As the legislators of Maryland, you are in a position to clear the air on this subject, and provide a simple yet clear labeling standard that food manufacturers have to adhere to. This is especially important as there has been a recent surge in introducing novel gene-altering technologies, such as the mRNA platform, into food. What’s more, clinical trials that involve applying these technologies to animals, for example, are not open to the public. I repeat: they are NOT open to the public. You cannot find them on clinicaltrials.gov. As we speak, gene-altering technologies are also being fast-tracked in developing plants as “mRNA factories”.

This situation creates a need-to-know: the customer has the right to know what is going into the body, especially with these fast-tracked technologies where the short-term data is not clear and the long-term data is simply absent. The consumers MUST be allowed to choose whether they would like to roll the dice on consuming food based on gene-altering technologies. And that is our sincere request to you: please allow us to be informed on this, and pass HB1421.