

Testimony before the Health and Government Operations Committee
March 3, 2020

In SUPPORT of H.B. 772: Food Procurement – GHG Emissions (Del. Gilchrist)

Presented by Madeline Bennett with [Balanced.org](https://www.balanced.org)

Dear Honorable Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Balanced and our supporters in the state, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 772 to establish a target of reducing Maryland's GHG emissions from food purchases by 25% by 2030. This would be accomplished by reducing food waste and shifting to more climate-friendly—and coincidentally healthier—menus in our public institutions.

Balanced is a nutrition and public health advocacy non-profit seeking to prevent and combat diet-related disease in communities across the United States by helping critical institutions shift toward healthier, more plant-rich menus. We work predominantly with public schools but have also worked with healthcare facilities, universities, worksites, and military bases. As a Maryland resident and public health advocate, I, along with my colleagues, care about this issue because we know that the immensity of the suffering stemming from our crisis of diet-related disease is as immeasurable as it is devastating. Speaking as a nutrition expert, I have seen ample evidence that carbon-intensive foods like red and processed meats, which are high in saturated fat and cholesterol, play a causative role in our worsening epidemic of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

The agriculture sector accounts for at least one quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions, and research has shown that we cannot meet the Paris Accord targets without shifting our diets toward foods with a smaller greenhouse gas footprint. This legislation recognizes that the state's own food procurement is the most direct point of leverage to reduce emissions associated with food consumption.

The state could meet this 25% reduction goal by cutting food waste and a moderate shift toward climate-friendly (plant-forward) menus. In addition to the benefits for climate, plant-forward menus will benefit the health of patients in Maryland's healthcare facilities, people who are incarcerated, and students at universities. On average, Americans are consuming significantly more meat than is recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Overconsumption of meat, especially red and processed meat, is linked to diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and even some forms of cancer. Preventing diet-related disease will help save the state money on healthcare costs in addition to improving the lives of Marylanders.

As for Maryland public health, most of the top ten leading causes of death are either directly attributable to or heavily influenced by an imbalanced diet. In 2017, there were over 11,600 deaths from heart disease and 10,800 deaths from cancer. Stroke, diabetes, and kidney disease cut short another 5,000 lives in Maryland in the same year. While not all of these deaths are always entirely linked to diet, to ignore diet's massive role in the expansion of these numbers is a deadly misunderstanding of the intimate connection between food and health. We have all lost someone as a result of diet-related disease, but there are modest systems-level changes our government can make to help shift our diets away from disease-promoting foods and toward health-boosting foods in order to mitigate the worsening health and climate crises on our hands. By 2030, Maryland is predicted to have 1.5 million cases of heart disease, more than

quadruple the number of cases reported in 2010. As the state's number one killer becomes four times more prevalent, thousands more preventable deaths will occur if there is not some form of legislative intervention. H.B. 772 presents an unbeatable and timely opportunity to address Maryland's growing health crisis and could save and extend many lives.

Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully urge a favorable report.