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Nutrition Action Healthletter

February 25, 2020

Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair
House Health and Government Operations
Committee, Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee
2 West -Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair
Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Vice Chair
House Judiciary Committee, Room 101
6 Bladen Street
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East - Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: FAVORABLE – SB-768/HB-819 – Health Standards – Plant-Based Meals in Prisons and Hospitals

Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs and Committee Members:

The Center for Science in the Public Interest supports SB-768/HB-819 that would require correctional facilities and certain health care facilities in the state of Maryland to adopt health and wellness standards for food service. CSPI is America's food and health watchdog with 10,000 members in Maryland. We work to change the food system to support healthy eating, safe food, and public health. CSPI has been recognized for its leadership in securing the Nutrition Facts label on packaged food, calorie labeling in chain restaurants, grocery, and convenience stores, improving school food, and making healthier food and beverages available in public spaces and through public programs.

Poor nutrition contributes to high rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic diseases, and these are more prevalent among incarcerated people than the general population. For most people, achieving a healthy diet requires a supportive environment. For incarcerated individuals and hospitalized patients, a facility's food environment is the most important determinant of their access to healthy food.

State and local governments and large institutions are increasingly adopting nutrition guidelines for the foods and beverages they purchase, serve, or sell on public property or through public programs. It is clearly critical to ensure that individuals in state custody are able to meet their nutritional needs.

Moreover, shifting state food dollars to healthier food is also a cost-effective way to prevent diet-related disease over the long run. Since a 2013 Executive Order required all Washington state agencies to adopt such guidelines, the state's Department of Corrections successfully brought its menus into compliance with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* without increasing food costs.

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. We would urge the Secretary to take this opportunity to establish nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages available in correctional and healthcare facilities that are consistent with or exceed the most recent *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

Passing this bill represents a key step toward supporting the health of Maryland's inmates and patients through healthier food. To ensure that it will deliver on this promise, strong nutrition guidelines must be included in the health and wellness standards for correctional and healthcare facilities.

Sincerely,



Margo G. Wootan, DSc
Vice President, Nutrition



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