

February 11, 2021

Senator Dolores G. Kelley, Chair
Senator Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Subject: FAVORABLE SB - 322 – Health Standards, Plant-Based
Meals in Prisons and Hospitals**

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and committee:

My name is Dr. Jasmol Sardana, and I am here on behalf of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and the Barnard Medical Center located near Chevy Chase, Maryland. I also reside in Howard County. I am a board-certified primary care physician specializing in internal medicine and lifestyle medicine.

Senate Bill 768 is a simple yet important measure that will lead to improved health outcomes for those in the State's care, and also provide both short-term and long-term cost-savings. This bill will require that hospitals and prisons make available plant-based meals for patients and prisoners.

I spend much of my time as a physician on counseling Marylanders how to reduce their risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and many chronic diseases brought on by poor dietary behavior. It does not help that they are often surrounded by unhealthful food options. If Maryland can positively affect the food environment for vulnerable populations like patients and prisoners, it is a moral imperative that they do so.

In Maryland more than 30% of the adult population is clinically obese.¹ The rate of diabetes in Maryland is now well over 12% and rises every year. Medicaid costs more than double for a patient with diabetes, a disease which costs the state more than \$6 billion per year.² The cost of poor dietary behavior goes well beyond diabetes alone.

Plant-based diets are strongly associated with improved health. They reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, kidney disease, diabetes, obesity, and several types of cancers, including colon, prostate, and esophageal cancer.

Plant-based eating can reverse or help to manage many chronic diseases. A plant-based diet can reverse coronary disease, lower blood pressure, and treat or reverse diabetes through improved glucose control. Studies of patients with even the most severe of heart disease have demonstrated reversal of their coronary blockages.

In June 2017, the American Medical Association passed a resolution that calls on U.S. hospitals to improve the health of patients, staff, and visitors by providing plant-based meals. The American College of Cardiology made similar recommendations in *Planting a Seed: Heart-Healthy Food Recommendations for Hospitals*. The ACC says that “hospitalization can be a ‘teachable moment’ for patients who are ready to embrace nutrition as part of the healing process.”

In 2018, California’s legislature passed a law requiring plant-based meals be available in hospitals and prisons. A similar law just became law in New York state, and the DC Council is also moving forward with such legislation.

The bottom line is that when people eat healthier, they are healthier. They suffer less and live longer. Plant-based diets reduce risks of diet related disease, which in turn reduces the cost of hospitalizations and medications for treating illness. Giving patients and prisoners in Maryland the ability to choose healthier meals benefits everyone.

I urge your support of SB 768 and I’m happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jasmol Sardana".

Jasmol Sardana, DO

1 America’s Health Rankings, <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/Diabetes/state/MD>
2 American Diabetes Association, <http://main.diabetes.org/dorg/PDFs/Advocacy/burden-of-diabetes/maryland.pdf>