



Division of Research and Economic Development

FAVORABLE

SB-322

Health Standards – Plant-Based Meals in Prisons and Hospitals

February 11, 2021 @ 1:30pm

Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs and Committees:

As the Assistant Vice President of Research and Innovation and Advocacy for Morgan State University (“Morgan”), it is a great honor and privilege to offer this letter of support of SB-322 Health and Wellness Standards - Correctional Facilities and Health Care Facilities. SB-322 serves as an opportunity for Morgan to expand its educational services to inmates while launching an innovative program that can bring evidenced based lifestyle therapeutic approaches to treating, and reversing chronic degenerative diseases to treat the cause of disease and not just symptoms, also known as Lifestyle Medicine.

Since 1999, Morgan State University has operated its Public Health Program to produce a new generation of public health professionals. In 2005, the School of Community Health and Policy (SCHP) was created to expand the University's health mission and program offerings to better respond to the need for a well prepared, diverse, culturally responsive health professions workforce. Salient characteristics of the School are its focus on urban communities, elimination of health disparities, and its use of a practice-based service learning framework.

Now that we are 20 years since the founding of the Public Health Program, and the health disparities in the communities Morgan serves have worsened with deaths from heart disease and diabetes complications souring to epic proportions. Our office of Research Innovation and Advocacy has embarked on an effort to produce a new generation of public health professionals equipped with new skills to tackle the health crisis of today.

In 2019, Morgan participated in a convening of all our Maryland HBCUs hosted by Attorney Saint-George, Political Action Chair of the NAACP Maryland State Conference, and the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, for the purpose of inviting our schools to participate in the U.S. Department of Education Second Chance Pell Grant program. The Pell program pays the tuition of inmates who desire to obtain an education in prison, which results in increased enrollment at each school. During the meeting Ms. Saint-George shared her goal introducing this bill during this 2020 Legislative Session and the need to create a prison education program that would help inmates to gain work ready skills as well as earn degrees so when they are released they are better equipped to be hired.



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Through the negotiation of the Letter of Intent for all the Maryland HBCUs with the DOE by Ms. Saint-George, all schools have or are now completing the application process to offer 4-year degree and certification programs in our Maryland prisons.

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Specifically, Morgan and Coppin have made requests to the DOE to offer a certification program in “Culinary Medicine” and Plant-based Nutrition, so that inmates can be trained in the preparation of plant-based meals not only for the prisons (to ensure that the quality and taste of the plant-based foods to be serve as a result of this bill is provided), but also to prepare inmates to become Plant-Based Chefs to meet the growing demand for chefs in the plant-based industry. As a result of Ms. Saint-George’s summer convening, Morgan and Coppin has been introduced to the American College of Lifestyle Medicine Culinary Medicine curriculum as a new and innovative program that both schools can adopt to certify inmates and on campus students in this new area of Lifestyle Medicine. The data is clear that most chronic degenerative diseases that our schools of public health have equipped students to address are diseases created by lifestyle that can be reversed or prevented.

Therefore, it is now the mission of our school to train inmates and our students with 21st Century interventions of Lifestyle Medicine to address the root causes of diseases to change the health outcomes in our communities.

Consequently, Morgan State University fully supports the objectives of SB-322 and plans to become a partner with the prisons, the Maryland Department of Health, Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities and the hospitals to produce the next generation of public health workers equipped with evidenced based health care that focuses on the cause of disease in order to effectively reduce the health disparities that impact the prison population and Maryland residents.



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Should your committee need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at Timothy.Akers@Morgan.Edu, 443.885.3798 (office), or 706.255.3963 (cell).

Sincerely,

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