

Feb 11, 2020

Testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 322** – Plant-based Options in Hospitals and Prisons
Before the Senate Finance Committee

Chair Kelly, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Friends of the Earth U.S. and our more than 24,000 members and supporters in Maryland, thank you for the opportunity to express our support for SB 322 to require that plant-based food options be made available at licensed healthcare facilities and establish a pilot program to expand plant-forward menus in state correctional facilities. The bill requires that plant-based options be made available to all patients in hospitals and residential treatment centers. It also establishes a two-year pilot program in four state correctional facilities whereby a) people who are incarcerated can elect to have all plant-based meals, b) people who are incarcerated will all receive at least one plant-based meal per week, c) correctional facility healthcare providers will be provided with information about plant-based nutrition, and d) the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services will report on outcomes from the pilot program.

Healthcare patients and people who are incarcerated should have access to healthy foods that meet their religious, ethical, personal, and dietary needs. Plant-based foods are increasingly in demand for health, environmental, and animal welfare reasons. Research suggests that 36 percent of U.S. consumers prefer milk and meat alternatives and that between 26 and 41 percent of Americans have eaten less meat over the past year. A study by the Hartman Group and Changing Tastes (2015) revealed that “food culture and eating norms are changing as dramatically and rapidly as the environmental and public health imperatives that are reshaping the nature of the food service industry” and that “today’s diners prefer meals that are healthier for the environment.” Hospitals serve some of our most vulnerable populations, and it is imperative to ensure they have the basic right to food that meets their needs, including a plant-based option.

Eating more plant-based foods is essential to meeting climate goals. In order for Maryland to meet its climate goals, it must reduce the emissions associated with food production—especially animal products, which emit significantly higher emissions than plant-based alternatives. Globally, the livestock sector accounts for more GHGs than the entire transportation sector. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that reducing consumption of animal products is one of the highest-impact strategies for mitigating agriculture’s effects on the climate and other aspects of our environment. One of the most direct and cost-effective ways that Maryland can encourage reduced consumption of meat and dairy is by requiring plant-based options to be available at institutions over which it has jurisdiction, including licensed hospitals and correctional facilities.

A diet rich in plant-based foods is better for our health and can reduce Maryland’s health care costs. An analysis of two weeks of menus provided by DPSCS showed that people incarcerated are being given twice as much meat, poultry, and eggs as the maximum recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGAs) for a 2,000 calorie diet. This legislation calls for one meal a week to be plant-based for all people incarcerated, which will bring DPSCS closer to compliance with the dietary guidelines. The DGAs identify low-meat, Mediterranean style and no-meat, vegetarian diets as viable options for a healthy nutritious diet.

The American Cancer Society has long recommended “a diet that limits processed meat and red meat, and that is high in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.”

Ample scientific evidence shows that high consumption of red and processed meats, in particular, is associated with increased risks of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers, while plant-based diets can help decrease the risks of all three. In 2015, the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified processed meat as a known human carcinogen and red meat, including beef and lamb, as a probable human carcinogen. In addition to saving lives, increasing opportunities to consume more plant-based foods can save Maryland millions of dollars in health care costs each year.

Providing plant-based options can save money that can be used to purchase more sustainable food that is locally or regionally produced, organic, or third-party-certified grass-fed, fair trade, or humane. As depicted in the chart on the right, plant-based foods are generally less expensive than meat and dairy. This holds true for DPSCS which reported that an average meat-based dinner costs \$1.66 compared to \$1.30 for a vegetarian meal. Even public institutions on a tight budget can realize cost savings from a shift towards more plant-based foods. For example, Friends of the Earth worked with Oakland Unified School District to document their carbon, water, and cost-savings over a period of two years as they switched their menus to be more plant-forward. The school district reduced its carbon footprint by 14 percent, their water footprint by 6 percent, and they were able to use the savings from reduced meat and dairy purchases to increase purchases of protein-rich legumes, fruits, vegetables, and better quality meat – improving students’ diets and saving the district \$42,000 annually. This cost-saving potential has been demonstrated in a hospital setting as well. A pilot analysis of Health Care Without Harm’s ‘Balanced Menus: Less Meat Better Meat’ program found that four San Francisco Bay Area hospitals generated an estimated foodservice savings of \$400,000 per year.

	FOOD	IMPACT (GHG emissions per gram of protein)	COST (Retail price per gram of protein)
LOW	Wheat		\$
	Corn		\$
	Beans, chickpeas, lentils		\$
	Rice		\$
	Fish		\$\$\$
	Soy		\$
	Nuts		\$\$\$
	Eggs		\$\$
MEDIUM	Poultry		\$\$
	Pork		\$\$
	Dairy(milk, cheese)		\$\$
HIGH	Beef		\$\$\$
	Lamb & goat		\$\$\$

Source: Adapted from Protein Scorecard. (2016). World Resources Institute. Retrieved from www.wri.org/resources/data-visualizations/protein-scorecard

In summary, we respectfully urge a favorable report for SB 322 to give hospital patients and people who are incarcerated the ability to choose a healthy, plant-based option, and we need to shift the menus to be more plant-forward for everyone. Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like sources or more information.