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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 & Hospitals

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Committee:

The U.S. spends at least 18% of its GDP (\$3.35 trillion) on health expenditures. If costs continue to rise, by 2050 Medicare and Medicaid alone will account for 20% of the GDP.¹ All projections point to continued rises in chronic disease. It has been stated by the American College of Lifestyle Medicine that Type 2 diabetes alone is a looming global pandemic with incalculable consequences.²

According to the American Diabetes Association, Maryland, as of 2014, Maryland spends \$6.5 Million on diabetes related illnesses.³ The Maryland Department of Health reports that heart disease is the number 1 cause of death of Maryland residents. According to the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, 80% or more of all healthcare spending in the U.S. is tied to the treatment of conditions rooted in poor lifestyle choices.

As result of this data regarding the poor health of Maryland Residents, Thrive Baltimore was founded as a dynamic community resource center located in the Station North community of Baltimore City to address the poor lifestyle choices of Baltimore residents through education. Run by a collective of food, environmental and social justice activists, our mission is to provide education, resources and support to anyone interested in adopting a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle.

Part of Thrive Baltimore’s mission is to provide free plant-based cooking demos, nutrition lectures, food tastings, film screenings and other fun, informational programming in an open, socially conscious environment

¹ See Lifestyle Medicine Economic Research - <https://lmeconomicresearch.org/>

² See What is Lifestyle Medicine <https://www.lifestylemedicine.org/What-is-Lifestyle-Medicine>

³ See “The Burden of Diabetes in Maryland” - American Diabetes Association, Maryland - <http://main.diabetes.org/dorg/PDFs/Advocacy/burden-of-diabetes/maryland.pdf>

that makes it a space where all are welcome. We're dedicated to encouraging people to make healthier, kinder choices that will enable them to live more conscious lifestyles.

By offering low-cost delicious vegan food at all our events, we at Thrive Baltimore are doing our part to raise awareness and address the health disparities and food access issues that plague Baltimore City. We're also providing a practical alternative to the current food systems which cause so much harm to our health, our planet and the animals with whom we share the Earth.

Thrive Baltimore supports SB-322 because it provides inmates and patients in hospitals the opportunity to choose to eat a healthy plant-based meal. Moreover, we are most excited about the fact that SB-322 also encourages medical professionals in prisons and hospitals to obtain education in plant-based nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine, which is the use of evidence-based lifestyle therapeutic approaches, such as a plant-predominant dietary lifestyle, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, stress management, avoiding use of harmful substances and pursuing other non-drug modalities to treat, reverse and prevent chronic disease. The educational training is aligned with our mission at Thrive and we believe that the education portion of the bill will be the greatest opportunity to truly reduce the health disparities that exist in Baltimore.

At the end day, when returned citizens are healthy and health care providers are properly equipped to prevent and reverse chronic degenerative disease, communities can truly become healthy communities.

Therefore, we request a favorable report for SB-322.

Sincerely,

Adam Weissman

Adam Weissman
Community Relations Manager