

January 19, 2021

Testimony before the House Health and Government Operations Committee
In **SUPPORT** of HB 317: Food Procurement – GHG Emissions (Del. Gilchrist)
Presented by Asha Subramanian, MD, MPH

Dear Chairman Pendergrass and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B.317 to establish a target of reducing Maryland's GHG emissions from food purchases by 25% by 2030. This would be accomplished in part by shifting to more climate-friendly – and also healthier – menus in our public institutions.

I am a Board-certified family physician with a combined MD/Masters in Public Health degree; fellowship certification in community medicine through Georgetown University; and a Diplomate of the American Board of Lifestyle Medicine. I have been practicing primary care in Maryland since 2008, and have seen firsthand the burden of chronic, preventable diseases in our state that are directly impacted by Marylanders' food choices.

Maryland needs to take aggressive action on climate change, and that includes addressing emissions from food consumption, which is a major category of GHGs globally. Shifting to more plant-forward diets is crucial to reducing these emissions and meeting the Paris Agreement target. I am providing testimony because the shift to more plant-forward diets would also significantly benefit the health of Marylanders served by our public institutions.

Diets high in plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts and low in animal products, particularly red and processed meat, have been shown to reduce diet-related diseases like diabetes, heart disease, renal failure, and even some forms of cancer. The evidence for this is overwhelming, which is why virtually every organization advocating for healthy diets recommends a plant-forward diet, including the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

On average, Americans are consuming significantly more meat than is recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and an analysis of two weeks of Maryland's prison menus showed this is the case for our state's correctional facilities, which are serving 53 ounces of meat, poultry, and eggs per week. The maximum recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for a 2,000 calorie diet is 26 ounces, though the DGAs also note that a vegetarian diet and a low-meat Mediterranean diet are healthy eating patterns.

Instead of making some of our most vulnerable residents – those who are incarcerated or in the state's long-term healthcare facilities – sick through the food we are feeding them and paying for their healthcare costs, the state should serve healthier, plant-forward menus, which are also climate-friendly. Ultimately preventing diet-related disease through more climate-friendly food purchasing will help save the state money on healthcare costs in addition to improving the lives of Marylanders.

H.B. 317 will benefit the climate and the health of Marylanders. Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully urge a favorable report.