



ALLEGHENY EAST CONFERENCE CORPORATION
of Seventh-day Adventists®

March 5, 2021

Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
225 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street, Room Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: FAVORABLE – HB1071 – Health Standards – Plant-Based Meals in Prisons
& Hospitals**

Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs and Committees:

The Allegheny East Conference Corporation of Seventh-Day Adventists (AEC) operates and oversees 170 churches, 34 companies and 9 missions with a membership of over 40,000 that reside in the states of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, New Jersey Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. In Maryland alone, we have approximately 174 SDA churches that represent approximately 60,000 members that include churches in the Columbia Union of churches. We are Bible-believing Christians who base faith, hope, and the future in Jesus Christ. The name 'Seventh-day' indicates our adherence to the Biblical Sabbath of Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, while 'Adventist' means we anticipate the promised return of Christ.

In addition, we operate health care institutions, like Adventist HealthCare, which is a not-for-profit health services organization based in Gaithersburg, Maryland that employs more than 6,000 people and provides healthcare for more than 400,000 individuals in the community each year.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is considered a pioneer of the vegetarian movement in America. As early as 1863, one of our church founders advocated for a return to the plant-based diet outlined in Genesis 1:29 which states, "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." The word "meat" in Hebrew means food. Consequently, the Church teaches that the original diet ordained by God is a plant-based diet that includes fruits, nuts, grains, vegetables, legumes, and seeds historically called the vegetarian diet, now termed a plant-based diet.

While the Church recognizes the Bible's express command in the Genesis, due to the mitigating circumstance of sin entering the world and the flood, the Church also recognizes that the Bible permitted the consumption of animal-based foods after the flood, with the restriction that only clean animals should be eaten. Nevertheless, the Church overall encourages its members to choose the Genesis 1:29 diet as the best dietary choice for spiritual growth and physical development based on the expressed Biblical command and based on the research done around the world that supports the Genesis diet as one that can prevent and even reverse disease.

However, many other variations of the vegetarian diet, like the lacto-ovo vegetarian diet that includes dairy and eggs, are also practiced by members according to their choice. Not all members are plant-based/vegetarians.

Nevertheless, over the Churches 150+ years of commitment to the plant-based diet, the Church is known for founding vegetarian food manufacturing companies around world. Most notable, is our Church university, Loma Linda University, large-scale long-term epidemiological study on vegetarians called the Adventist Health Study, which demonstrated for the first time in the U.S. the health benefits of the plant-based/vegetarian diet. The study showed vegetarians had much lower rates of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke and several other major degenerative diseases. Later in 2004, National Geographic performed a 10-year study called the Blue Zones and identified Seventh-day Adventist members living in Loma Linda, California are amongst those who live the longest in the world.

The Blue Zone study identified the healthful living practices, including the plant-based/vegetarian dietary lifestyle of the Church as one of the main reasons for longer life for those living in Loma Linda. Due to our history as a pioneer plant-based Church, AEC supports the legislative objectives of SB-322, which is to provide inmates and patients in hospitals the ability to choose plant-base meal options. While our Church hospitals share the rich history of vegetarian advocacy, due to our Churches respect for the dietary choices of the people we serve in our hospitals, our hospitals have not predominantly served plant-based meals in order to accommodate the taste preferences of its patients.

Consequently, the Church sees HB1071 as an opportunity for our hospitals to return to our historic Bible and evidenced based roots of vegetarianism, which our own epidemiological studies proved long ago, as the solution to preventing and even reversing chronic degenerative disease.

Furthermore, one of the Churches very active ministries in the U.S. are our prison ministries and HB1071 will allow our prison inmate converts to have the option to choose plant-based meals in Maryland correctional facilities?

It is for these reasons that the AEC requests a favorable report for HB1071 with amendments.

Sincerely,



Jackson M. Doggette Jr., Esq.,
General Counsel