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Testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 1352** – Health and Wellness Standards for Correctional Facilities  
Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

Chairman Pendergrass 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 HB 1352 to require health and wellness standards for correctional facilities, require religious meal options and plant-based food options for people who request them, and conduct a pilot program in four facilities to offer a plant-based meal option at each meal one day per week.

**People who are incarcerated should have access to healthy foods that meet their religious, ethical, personal, and dietary needs.** Right now, Maryland has no required nutrition standards for meals served in correctional facilities, and people who are incarcerated are not always able to access foods that are nutritionally appropriate or that meet their religious, ethical, personal, or other dietary needs. As documented in a [2021 report from the Maryland Food and Prison Abolition Project](#), the carceral food environment in Maryland constitutes a human rights crisis. Their research found that food unfit for human consumption was routinely being served, that food was regularly used as a tool for violence, and that the quality and nutritional content of meals was unacceptably poor. This legislation is only one small part of what is needed to reform the carceral food environment in Maryland, but at the very least, the state must establish health and wellness standards consistent with current scientific nutrition guidelines and ensure people who are incarcerated have access to meals that are consistent with their religious, ethical, personal and dietary needs.

**Diets higher in plant-based foods are better for our health and can reduce Maryland's health care costs.** This legislation will establish a pilot program in four facilities where plant-based meals will be served at least one day per week to everyone, and at every meal for those who request it. 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 day 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 money 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. 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.

	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](http://www.wri.org/resources/data-visualizations/protein-scorecard)

**In summary, we respectfully urge a favorable report for HB 1352 to give people who are incarcerated the ability to choose a healthy, plant-based option.** Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like sources or more information.