



Testimony of Ricarra Jones, Political Director of 1199SEIU
Health and Wellness Standards - Correctional Facilities and Health Care Facilities
HB-0059

Position: Support
February 14, 2023

1199SEIU Healthcare Workers East (1199SEIU) is the largest healthcare union in the country with, with over 450,000 members throughout Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Florida and Washington, D.C. **We fully support this ground breaking bill that contains a component, which, if passed, could result in our Maryland healthcare workers obtaining training in Lifestyle Medicine and plant-based nutrition as well as providing inmates and patients in hospitals the right to request plant-based meals.**

It is no secret that 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. It is also a well-known fact that 80% or more of all healthcare spending in the U.S. is tied to the treatment of conditions rooted in poor lifestyle choices. Chronic diseases and conditions—such as hypertension, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, multiple types of cancer—are among the most common, costly and preventable of all health conditions.

What is most alarming, however, is that most physicians and healthcare workers in our union do not receive adequate training in the basics of Lifestyle Medicine—nutrition and physical activity—yet we know that 85 percent of chronic disease today is caused by unhealthy lifestyle choices in these and other areas.

Furthermore, it is our union healthcare workers who are responsible either with delivering and/or assisting patients in hospitals with consuming their meals when admitted. Our workers, in many instances, want to provide or help patients to eat better food when they are admitted into the hospital, but most meal menus in hospitals do not have whole plant-based meal options. Therefore, patients who may want to choose to eat plant-based foods with high in fiber and complex carbohydrates do not have an option on the hospital menu to select a plant-based meal. Also, our community health workers would be empowered with new tools and approaches to assist patients released from the hospital with maintaining better lifestyle habits will improve the patient outcomes.

Finally, we also strongly support the ability for inmates to choose to improve their health through the consumption of whole plant-based meals in prison.

Consequently, 1199SEIU strongly supports HB0059 as a bill that will help revolutionize health care delivery and health outcomes through access to whole plant-based foods for patients and inmates and through the

bills education and training component as it addresses the need for medical physicians and healthcare staff to be up to date with the food trends in the market so health care delivery is not only cost effective but yields outcomes that can lead to reduction of chronic degenerative diseases within Maryland, particularly in minority communities.

This is our third year of support and look forward to seeing this bill passed.

We, therefore, urge members of Maryland's General Assembly to pass HB-0059.