

PhysiciansCommittee

for Responsible Medicine

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February 10, 2023

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
The Honorable, Ariana B. Kelly, Vice Chair
Maryland House of Delegates Health & Government Operations
Committee House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Favorable HB0059 – “Health and Wellness Standards – Correctional Facilities”

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair Kelly, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and over 11,000 of our members living in Maryland, I respectfully submit this letter of support for HB0059. We enthusiastically support the directive to pilot expanding access to healthful, plant-based meals in Maryland’s prisons.

There are multiple reasons to support this pilot program. Most importantly, diets that focus on plants confer an abundance of health benefits and reduce a person’s risk of chronic conditions. Plant-based eating patterns have consistently been found to be protective against and even reverse these diseases.

There is a clear public health consensus on the benefits of eating more and even exclusively plants. A plant-based diet has been proven to improve cholesterol; it can prevent and even reverse type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and heart disease. While reducing the burden of these diseases is always good policy, it’s become abundantly clear in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that these conditions have relevance for susceptibility to viral infections. Healthful, plant-based diets support immune health and can be protective against severe COVID-19 infections. This bill could help Maryland correctional facilities to mitigate the impacts of future outbreaks.

Additionally, passage and implementation of HB0059 could incur cost saving benefits to correctional facilities. This could happen by virtue of the preventative and therapeutic effects of plant-based diets, thereby reducing healthcare expenditures. Comparable institutions who have led the way with plant-based meals have also discovered savings due to the lower costs of plant foods than animal foods.

The Physicians Committee, along with other organizations and in consultation with nutrition and medical experts, developed and eagerly offer up our [Universal Meals](#) program. Designed for institutions like hospitals, schools, and prisons, it is a free resource that contains healthful, plant-based recipes without animal products or common allergens. Universal Meals recipes also help keep food costs low and could serve as a nutritious, cost effective, and culturally sensitive starting point for Maryland prisons.

We ask the Committee to advance HB0059 and encourage all members of the House of Delegates to support the legislation. Thank you so much for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Noah Praamsma, MS, RDN
Nutrition Education Coordinator, PCRM