



February 10, 2023

Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Delegate Ariana B. Kelly, Vice Chair
House Health and Government Operations
Committee, Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair
Delegate David Moon, Vice Chair
House Judiciary Committee, Room 101
6 Bladen Street - House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: FAVORABLE ON HB-0059 – Health Standards Plant-Based Meals in Prisons & Hospitals.

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Committee:

The Standard American Diet (SAD) is a modern dietary pattern that is generally characterized by high intakes of red meat, processed meat, pre-packaged foods, butter, fried foods, high-fat dairy products, eggs, refined grains, potatoes, corn (and high-fructose corn syrup) and high-sugar drinks. While the SAD diet is what Americans choose to eat, a review of the 5-week meal cycle, which shows the food served by Maryland Department of Public Safety in its state-wide correctional facilities, shows that the inmates (who do not have a choice of what they can eat) are served 25 million meals a year of the same SAD diet, which consist on average of 52 oz of meat, poultry and eggs per week. This analysis shows that meals are deficient in key nutrients such as fiber, vitamin K (from fresh greens) and several other vitamins, and provides significantly too much protein, fat and sodium. The analysis also shows that inmates are receiving 48% more protein and 101% more carbohydrates than the recommended daily allowance, while receiving 50% less fiber and 30% less water recommended for a baseline healthy diet.

What makes this diet particularly SAD, is that the animal food served to the inmates is almost 2 times than the maximum recommendation of 26 oz per week from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. As a certified holistic nutritionist, and wellness advocate for the life-saving benefits of plant-based nutrition, I can say, based on my review of the DPSC Master Meal Cycle, that the diet served to the inmates in Maryland's correctional facilities substantially increases the inmates risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, stroke and some forms of cancer. If an inmate went into any one of the facilities without any disease and not on medication, after several years of eating the food in corrections, the inmate is likely to develop some type of chronic disease, which consequently raises the risk of COVID mortality.

I earned my Ph.D. and M.S. in Industrial and Systems Engineering, from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and what I view as a primary problem is that more funding is spent on treating chronic disease, at \$19 per day per inmate or \$136 million per year as compared to the \$1.66 spent on meals. These spend amounts need to be reversed, wherein more is spent on whole plant-based food and less on prescriptions and expensive surgeries.

Another issue with the prison food services, is the quantity and quality of the food served. Based on the master meal cycle the quality of food served is poor due to highly processed meats, breads and sugar filled products. The quantity of extremely processed foods, containing high amounts of saturated fats, cholesterol and sugar are much too high. Additionally, it is reported that the food tastes bad and is not properly handled, which results in contamination and spoilage. According to reports by the prison research group "Farm To Prison" which has analyzed the food production and procurement system in most of the state facilities for the last year, the prison food is cooked and served by the inmates who are rotated out in and out of the kitchen every 6 months. This rapid turn over of inmate workers, contributes to poor quality food and improper handling due to quick and ineffective training.

To address these nutritional, quantity, and quality issues, I will be working with Coppin State to provide a Plant-Based Culinary Medicine and nutrition course in the prisons to train the workers and inmates so that they will choose the plant-based meal options provided through HB-0059. Dr. Tracy Murry will speak more about the U.S. Department Second Chance Pell Grant program that allows universities to enter the prisons to offer degree and certificate programs.

Therefore, through training, education and the passage of HB-0059, I am confident that inmates who enter Maryland's correctional facilities can, if they choose, leave in equal or better health thereby costing the state less money on health care and reduce recidivism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruby Lathon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ruby" being more prominent than the last name "Lathon".

Ruby Lathon, PhD
Certified Holistic Nutritionist
Director, Roadmap to Holistic Health