



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

February 14, 2023

**Health and Government Operations Committee
Judiciary Committee**

HB 59

Health and Wellness Standards - Correctional Facilities

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), on behalf of our Maryland supporters, strongly supports House Bill 59, which updates the minimum mandatory standards for inmate food services to reflect current nutritional best practices and scientific guidelines, including offering the option of plant-based meals. The bill also establishes a Correctional Facilities Health and Wellness Pilot Program at four State correctional facilities, to evaluate the impact of these new dietary standards on inmate health status, health care utilization and health care costs. Incarcerated individuals in Maryland have a higher rate of disease burden compared to the general population, and research has shown that consumption of plant-based meals can boost immunity, improve health, and reduce disease burden and associated health care costs.

Plant-based options are growing in popularity. Over half of Americans are currently trying to incorporate more plant-based meals into their daily lives, according to a survey conducted by OnePoll. Even fast-food chains are now offering plant-based foods. Burger King and Del Taco provide plant-based burgers and tacos. This month, KFC launched plant-based chicken at its locations nationwide. McDonald's CEO said their offering of a plant-based burger is a matter of "when," not "if." Restaurant Brands (BK's parent company) CEO Jose Cil noted that Burger King's plant-based Impossible Whopper is a "huge hit" and that it was "one of the most successful product launches in Burger King's history." Restaurant industry publication QSR magazine declared, "It's no longer a question of whether or not the plant-based movement is here to stay."

The three largest foodservice companies in the country, Compass Group, Sodexo, and Aramark—which run the dining operations at tens of thousands of hospitals, universities, K-12 schools, museums, stadiums, and more—all have initiatives to provide more plant-based meals to their clients on a national scale. These food service companies are responding to the overall increase in demand for plant-based meal choices reflect the importance of offering healthy food options.

Incorporating more plant-based proteins into our diet is a great way to promote health and prevent a variety of diseases. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, people who choose plant-based diets are “at reduced risk of certain health conditions, including ischemic heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer, and obesity.”

By providing at least one plant-based meal option and at least one plant-based beverage to all inmates at each meal at least 1 day each week; and offering one plant-based meal option and one plant-based beverage option to an inmate at every meal on request as outlined in HB 59, incarcerated individuals in Maryland will have the opportunity to improve their nutritional intake and improve their overall health and well-being.

Having a Pilot Program for plant-based options as proposed in HB 59 will allow the state to address and improve upon any implementation barriers that may arise, and also assess the impact of offering plant-based meals at correctional facilities.

People in prison deserve options because they have a higher overall burden of chronic disease and are more susceptible to infectious disease due to often crowded living conditions. Offering plant-based meal options can increase the health status of inmates, with the potential to improve rehabilitative and restorative outcomes and reduce health care costs. Access to plant-based food provides healthy and ethical choices to inmates who otherwise do not have the ability to prepare their own meals.

In summary this bill is important because providing plant-based nutrient dense options can help inmates receive more nutritious food leading to better health outcomes that benefit not only the individual, but the overall state. We thank the committee for your consideration of this important legislation and request your support of HB 59 this session.