

January 31, 2024

Ensure that food in DC's jails heals, instead of harms – Improve DOC food service NOW!

Dear Councilmember Pinto and members of the Council of the District of Columbia:

As organizations that care about food security, conditions of confinement, and public safety in our city, we urge you to strengthen the nutrition and hospitality training provisions included in the Secure DC Omnibus bill.

As introduced, the Secure DC bill does not go far enough to make meaningful improvements to the way we feed and treat our most vulnerable citizens housed in our correctional facilities – many of whom already suffer from food insecurity, addiction, homelessness and mental health challenges. We urge you to prioritize the following amendments before a final vote on the bill:

- Require the Department of Health, not DOC, to draft the new nutrition standards that DOC will have to fulfill.
- Require unannounced inspections of the food service and additional reporting on nutrition and specialty meals (religious and otherwise).
- Require DOC to gather feedback on the food service from facility residents, such as periodic surveys.

All of these changes deserve your support – and serve the interests of D.C. taxpayers and voters. When we ignore people's health and dignity in our jails, we undermine thriving communities and drive public health expenditures upward in the long run. We cannot end cycles of violence in the District without healthy communities, and our commitment to ending food insecurity in this city must extend inside the walls of our correctional facilities.

The DOC currently spends \$6.5 million taxpayer dollars per year contracting for food that residents describe as inedible and lacking nutrition. We can do better, and this bill moves us in the right direction. It also positions the District among those corrections agencies pursuing best practices in mitigating public health impacts of incarceration and improving reentry outcomes. Like [Cleveland](#), [Dallas](#), [Boston](#), and [Chicago](#), the District can be a leader in using food service and hospitality as a career path for returning citizens. We can also improve the working environment inside our correctional facilities for DOC staff by ensuring residents have nutritional meals and conflict over food service is minimized. Nine out of ten residents currently say they don't get enough to eat.

The residents of D.C.'s jails are our neighbors, friends and family members. They will come home to rejoin our communities, so it is counterproductive to compound their sentences with dietary neglect if public safety is our goal. Nutritious food in jail is not a luxury — it is a cornerstone of rehabilitation and a testament to our values as a society. Please pass a bill that improves food in DC's correctional facilities now!

Sincerely,
ACLU of the District of Columbia
Amazing Gospel Souls, Inc.
Catholic Charities - Washington
Center for Science in the Public Interest

Changing Perceptions DC
DC Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
DC Good Food Purchasing Coalition
DC Greens
DC Hunger Solutions
DC Justice Lab
DC Veg Week
Dreaming Out Loud, Inc.
Episcopal Diocese of Washington
The Festival Center
Foley Hoag LLP
Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop
The Green Scheme
H.E.L.P.
International CURE
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia
The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens
Neighbors for Justice
Northeastern University School of Law Action Lab (DC office)
The Platform of Hope DC
ReThink Justice DC Coalition
The Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness
The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
Who Speaks For Me?