

March 3, 2021

The Honorable Adrin Nazarian
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 558 - School meals: plant-based food and milk options: California School Plant-Based Food and Beverage Program - **SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Nazarian:

I am writing in support of AB 558, and am thankful that you have introduced this important bill to encourage public schools maintaining grades K-12, inclusive, to provide plant-based food options and plant-based milk options in order to increase access to meals that meet the dietary, cultural, philosophical, and religious needs of pupils and their families, support California's climate mitigation goals, and promote the consumption of healthy food by all school-age children by establishing the California School Plant-based Food and Beverage Program.

Mounting evidence shows that shifting diets toward plant-based foods is imperative for addressing climate change and reducing high rates of diet-related diseases. With 540 million lunches served each year, California public schools can play a major role in reducing the state's impact on climate change and improving student health. By incentivizing plant-based meals in public schools, the state can achieve a significant and measurable reduction in our food consumption-based GHG emissions while improving access to healthy food for California's six million kids who receive free and reduced lunch.

Public health experts overwhelmingly agree on the need to reduce consumption of processed and red meat in favor of more plant-based foods. Americans are overconsuming meat and dairy, which has been linked to diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and even certain forms of cancer. According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, teenage boys, in particular, are consuming too much meat. Meanwhile, diets high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans help prevent these diseases, saving our nation billions of dollars in costs from diet-related chronic diseases.

Additionally, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other chronic diseases were found to be related to higher mortality rates for those that contracted Covid-19. For instance, [among people with diabetes the mortality rate from Covid-19 was 7.3%, more than three times that of the overall population.](#)

For the above stated reason, I thank you for authoring AB 558 and respectfully request your colleagues in the legislature to vote "aye" on this important measure.

Best regards and all our respect,