

# The Food in Jails Should Heal, Not Harm: Advancing Food in Jails Through Grassroots Organizing and Policy



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
FoodEquityCouncil

*Heaven Jordan*

# Advancing Food in Jails

## Promoting Health and Dignity in the Prison Food Environment

The Food in Jails Should Heal, Not Harm Campaign's vision insofar as prisons exist, the food environment in Prince George's County jail facilitates health and well-being and respects human dignity both inside and beyond the prison walls for all who are impacted from farm to fork.

- ✓ Led by PG Changemakers, Life After Release, and Prince George's County Food Equity Council.
- ✓ Focused on centering the experiences of those formerly incarcerated to introduce equitable policy that better the food environment in County jails.
- ✓ Gained insight through surveys, focus groups, and interviews.



# Food Quality in County Jails

*The sad truth about the state of food in Prince George's County jails*

**45%**

Relied on commissary for food intake

**100%**

Participants unsatisfied with food quality

**0%**

Received fresh fruits or vegetables

## **FOOD WASTE**

Nearly all participants reported that they did not eat everything offered on their meal tray because of poor quality

## **TEMPERATURES**

Participants described food as being lukewarm or cold

## **WATER QUALITY**

Participants expressed difficulties obtaining clean water

# Impact of Poor Food in Jails

## While incarcerated

Participants described changes in weight, digestive issues, vomiting, sickness, and hunger.

## Long-Term Effects

Long-term impacts include high blood pressure, diabetes, body aches/pains, digestive issues, and traumatic responses to food that they had consumed in jail.



## Food Waste

The majority of participants shared that they were unable to eat all of their food due to poor food quality.

## Mental Consequences

Mentally, the food conditions made them feel “angry,” “worthless,” and depressed.



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
FoodEquityCouncil

# Recommendations

- Improved nutrition quality of food
  - ◆ Participants advised that food should be fresh and healthy to improve incarcerated individual's physical and emotional health, both in jail and after release. Portion sizes should be increased, especially for men, who require a higher daily caloric intake.
- Improved taste of food
  - ◆ Food served should not be unappetizing to the incarcerated population. Participants requested that meals should be hot, not lukewarm, and contain seasoning so that foods are not bland. Improving the taste of food will increase consumption, which will positively impact the well-being of incarcerated individuals.
- Improved commissary options
  - ◆ 45% of participants reported that they relied on the commissary for the majority of their food intake while incarcerated. They recommended that commissary options should be more affordable, healthier, and higher quality.

# Next Steps

- Check out [the full report](#)
- Join our coalition and advocate with us by reaching out to me at Heaven Jordan at [heaven@pgcfec.org](mailto:heaven@pgcfec.org)
- Introduction of the bill will happen on 3/21 in Prince George's County Council. Join us in supporting the improvement of food in jails!



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
FoodEquityCouncil