

P-05-865 Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals, Correspondence – Petitioner to Chair, 29.04.19

Response to Kirsty Williams AC/AM & Vaughan Gething AC/AM letter dated 4 April, for consideration by Welsh Petition Committee at meeting 7 May 2019

We note the content of the joint letter from the Minister for Education and Minister for Health and Social Services, which outlines the regulations in schools and hospitals concerning the provision of food, especially the statements that 'vegan children are not excluded' and 'the menus include vegan foods' respectively.

It appears that the Ministers have fundamentally misunderstood what our e-petition 'Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals' is requesting.

Our petition is calling for a plant-based option to be guaranteed on every standard public sector menu. In practice this would mean that there would be a plant-based option on every standard menu in all public sector schools, hospitals, prisons, councils, care homes and any other state or local authority run institution in Wales, every day. This would be available to everyone, without anyone having to make a special request. This differs from the current situation as outlined in the Ministers' response where vegans, in theory, can be catered for by special request.

We feel that this change in legislation is necessary for the following reasons:

- **Vegan Rights** - Despite the Ministers' reassurances that vegans are catered for by state/local authority institutions, in practice this is often not the case. Vegans are often told they cannot be provided for or are offered very limited, options such as dry toast, an apple or a packet of crisps, which do not constitute a nutritious meal. Vegans are legally protected under Human Rights and Equality legislation in the UK, so offering a plant-based meal as standard on all public sector menus is an easy way to ensure that the ever-growing number of Welsh vegans are catered for and not discriminated against.
- **Sustainable** – Plant-based diets have a whole host of environmental benefits over standard diets, including up to 50% less associated greenhouse gas emissions, 75% less land and 50% less water required. Last year researchers at the University of Oxford concluded that eating a plant-based diet could be 'the single biggest way' to reduce an individual's environmental impact on the planet. Increasing access to plant-based food via the public sector will lead to more environmentally-friendly long-term dietary choices.

- Public Health - Research has linked plant-based diets with lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as lower rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer. Building familiarity with plant-based food in public sector settings could help address some of the many diet-related public health crises affecting the UK and putting strain on the NHS.
- Inclusive - Plant-based food is inclusive and can be enjoyed by almost everyone, including vegans, vegetarians, and those looking to reduce their animal product consumption for health or environmental reasons. It is also straightforward to make vegan dishes suitable for people with religious dietary requirements, including people who follow the Islamic, Jewish, Sikh or Hindu faiths.

These 4 reasons underpin why we believe this change, above the existing regulations, to be necessary. Wales has the opportunity to lead the way in the UK, in terms of protecting its ever-growing vegan population, and taking meaningful action to address climate change and diet-related public health crises. We believe that these issues are of the utmost importance and so the public sector should be leading by example and taking appropriate action now.