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Budget and Taxation Committee  
Education, Business and  
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Pensions Subcommittee  
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Audit and Evaluation Committee

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

Fair Practices and  
State Personnel Oversight

Joint Committee on Pensions

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson

SB942: Health and Wellness Standards- Correctional Facilities

Good afternoon Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of The Judicial Proceedings Committee. I am here to present SB942 Health and Wellness Standards- Correctional Facilities

When people think of prison food, they usually do not feel enticed to eat it; in fact, they feel the complete opposite, and for good reason. The same food brands that supply food to prisons also supply food to schools. If the fact that jail food is provided in places where your children go to school every day bothers you, it should bother you that people in prison who are other people's children consume it as well. People who are incarcerated are six times more likely to contract foodborne illnesses than the general population due to the poor standards of health and wellness in correctional facilities. The food consumed by incarcerated individuals are high in salt, sodium, and sugars which elevates the risk of diabetes and heart failure in this population. An alarming 47% of African Americans in the United States are diagnosed with cardiovascular disease so it is vital to note that African Americans make up a large portion of the prison and jail population putting them at risk for severe health complications.

This legislation requires the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services, with the advice of the Secretary of Health, to update the minimum mandatory standards for incarcerated individuals food services. It also requires updates at least every five years thereafter and will establish a Correctional Facilities and Health and Wellness Pilot Program. This program will take charge in establishing the minimum mandatory standards for inmate food services. Four State correctional facilities will be selected by the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services who will report specified information to the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities and the General Assembly. Finally, the Secretary of Health must set health and wellness standards for the pilot program. These efforts will improve the health and quality of life of individuals who are incarcerated.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for SB942.