

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
AND REHABILITATION**
*Ka 'Oihana Ho'omalua Kalaima
a Ho'oponopono Ola*
1177 Alakea Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

TOMMY JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

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Deputy Director
Correctional Institutions

Sanna Muñoz
Deputy Director
Rehabilitation Services
and
Programs

No. _____

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 1874
RELATING TO PLANT-BASED FOOD AND DRINKS.

by
Tommy Johnson, Director
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

House Committee on Labor
Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 5, 2026; 9:30 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 309 & via Videoconference

Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) **opposes** House Bill (HB) 1874, which proposes to establish a plant-based-by-default program for state-operated prisons, state-licensed hospitals, and government-sponsored events.

The DCR currently offers vegetarian options for committed persons who request them at all eight (8) correctional facilities statewide. In Fiscal Year 2025, the DCR served 3,530,634 meals, of which 188,343 (approximately 5%) were vegetarian.

Under the proposal, committed persons may opt out of the default option. Our current system successfully meets the demand for meat-free alternatives without disrupting large-scale operations. Given that only 5% of our current population chooses vegetarian options, it is anticipated that the sheer volume of "opt out" requests would be overwhelming compared to our efficient "opt in" process.

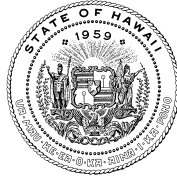
In addition to inmate meals, DCR is required to serve the same meals to our Adult Corrections Officer (ACO) staff. We anticipate a large percentage of our staff would opt out of this option if implemented, overwhelming our Food Services staff at each of our eight (8) facility kitchens who would be responsible for tracking these requests.

The DCR further notes that a plant-based diet makes it difficult to maintain the level of daily protein required in a correctional setting. Plant-based proteins are predominantly derived from nuts, beans, lentils, oats, and some vegetables such as peas, spinach, and broccoli. These products are not currently produced locally in the quantities we would require, making it even more challenging for DCR to comply with the benchmarks established by Act 176, SLH 2021 (Purchase of Fresh Local Agricultural Products and Local Value-Added, Processed, Agricultural, or Food Products). We already purchase a large amount of local beef products (29% in FY2025). This additional requirement would set us back.

Requiring the DCR shift to a plant-based-by-default program creates unnecessary burden and ignores the established preferences of staff, as well as those in our custody and care.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **opposition** of HB 1874.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



KEITH A. REGAN
COMPTROLLER
KA LUNA HO'OMALU HANA LAULĀ

MEOH-LENG SILLIMAN
DEPUTY COMPTROLLER
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OMALU HANA LAULĀ

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTING AND GENERAL SERVICES | KA 'OIHANA LOIHELU A LAWELAWÉ LAULĀ
P.O. BOX 119, HONOLULU, HAWAII 96810-0119

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
OF
KEITH A. REGAN, COMPTROLLER
DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTING AND GENERAL SERVICES
TO THE

COMMITTEE ON LABOR

FEBRUARY 5, 2026, 9:30 A.M.
CONFERENCE ROOM 309 AND VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE, STATE CAPITOL

H.B. 1874

RELATING TO GOVERNMENT

Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.B. 1874.

The Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS) offers **comments** for H.B. 1874 which requires the departments of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Accounting and General Services, and Health to establish a Plant-Based-By-Default Program for food and drinks offered at state-operated prisons, state licensed hospitals, and government-sponsored events. This measure also requires annual reports to the Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission.

The establishment and management of a plant-based-by-default program for government sponsored events does not align with DAGS's purpose. In addition, DAGS does not have the authority and resources to track and report on food purchased by our

tenants and employees at DAGS facilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 11:00:21 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Bohlen	Climate Protectors Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support!

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 5:24:00 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Helen Cox	Kauai Climate Action Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

Climate Action Coalition strongly supports HB1874. To have a default plant food option preserves choice while also addressing health and climate benefits of plant based food. Where implemented elsewhere, the satisfaction level is high, so there is precedent for taking this important step. Please support and pass HB1874. Mahalo



February 3, 2026

To: Chair Representative Jackson Sayama, Vice Chair Representative Mike Lee, and the members of the House Committee on Labor

Subject: **HB1874**, Relating to Plant-Based Food and Drinks

Aloha,

I am writing in **support of HB1874 with comments**. This measure aims to establish a plant-based-by-default program for food and beverages served in state-operated prisons, state-licensed hospitals, and at government-sponsored events.

While the global climate crisis will affect all around the world, Hawai'i is especially at risk, being one of the first in line to feel its impacts. A vegan plant-based diet has the potential to reduce our carbon footprint by up to 50% if widely adopted, along with helping improve overall human and environmental health^{1, 2}. While a plant-based diet has its benefits, normalizing such a diet is key to promoting its adoption across the state, and **HB1874** can be the catalyst.

The adoption of a plant-based diet alone can help mitigate climate change and current public health issues, but where and how ingredients for the plant-based foods are grown matters just as much. I make the suggestion that **sourcing local and organically grown produce should be made a priority**.

I urge this committee to pass HB1874, which will make plant-based foods more readily available, which will, in turn, support local agriculture, improve public health, and help us do our part in tackling global climate change.

Mahalo,
Sydney Haas & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

¹ Alcalá-Santiago, Á., Rodríguez-Martín, N. M., Casas-Albertos, E., Gálvez-Navas, J. M., Castelló-Pastor, A., García-Villanova, B., & Molina-Montes, E. (2025). Nutrient adequacy and environmental foot-print of Mediterranean, pesco-, ovo-lacto-, and vegan menus: A modelling study. *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2025.1681512>

² Wang, T., Masedunskas, A., Willett, W. C., & Fontana, L. (2023). Vegetarian and vegan diets: Benefits and drawbacks. *European Heart Journal*, 44(36), 3423–3439. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurheartj/ehad436>



To: The House Committee on Labor (LAB)
From: Sherry Pollack, Co-Founder, 350Hawaii.org
Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026, 9:30am

In support of HB1874

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the LAB Committee,

I am Co-Founder of the Hawaii chapter of 350.org, the largest international organization dedicated to fighting climate change. 350Hawaii.org **supports HB1874**. This measure requires the Departments of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Accounting and General Services, and Health to establish a Plant-Based-By-Default Program for food and drinks offered at state-operated prisons, state-licensed hospitals, and government-sponsored events.

Plant-based-by-default simply means that plant-based meals are served automatically, while anyone who wants an animal-based meal can still request one. It preserves full choice while shifting the default to the most **cost-effective and health-promoting** option.

Offering meals that contain more plant-based foods such as fruits and vegetables is a triple win. It can save money, help reduce risk for developing chronic diseases and improve overall health, and at the same time, offer sustainable food choices that will help mitigate climate breakdown. Plant-based foods – such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, peas, nuts, and lentils – generally cost less, use less energy, land, and water, and have lower greenhouse gas intensities than animal-based foods.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1874. By passing this measure, Hawaii reaffirms its commitment to supporting local agriculture, and to improving the health of our people and our planet.

Sherry Pollack
Co-Founder, 350Hawaii.org

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 9:27:46 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Skow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, and Vice Chair Lee and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Stephanie Skow, and I am a physician on Kauai. I'm in strong support of Plant-Based-by-Default Bill in our state institutions.

Plant-based-by-default simply means that plant-based meals are served automatically, while anyone who wants an animal-based meal can still request one. It preserves full choice while shifting the default to the most **cost-effective and health-promoting** option.

This policy **saves money** in four major ways:

First, food costs drop immediately: staples like beans, lentils, rice, vegetables, and tofu cost far less than meat, which is one of the most expensive items in institutional budgets.

Second, healthcare costs decline. Incarcerated people and hospital patients have high rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity — all conditions that improve with plant-based diets, reducing medication use, ER visits, re-admissions, and costly medical transports.

Third, operational costs fall because plant-based meals require less refrigeration, reduce food-safety risks, and lower labor and equipment needs.

And finally, reducing meat consumption lowers climate-related costs and aligns with Hawai'i's climate commitments.

We also have strong real-world evidence. New York City's public hospital system adopted plant-based-by-default in 2022: over 60% of patients chose the plant-based option, satisfaction exceeded 90%, and the system saved millions annually. Hawaii has the opportunity to lead the nation by applying this proven, cost-saving model across our institutions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephanie Skow, MD

4334 Rice St. #204

Lihue, HI 96766

Office: 808-634-2376

stephanieskow@yahoo.com

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:39:49 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
katherine skow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and committee members

I'm a former teacher, living in Kapa'a, and currently working as medical office manager in Lihue.

I strongly support the Plant-Based-by-Default Bill for our state institutions. This approach serves plant-based meals by default but still allows requests for animal-based options, maintaining choice while promoting cost-effective, healthy eating.

This policy saves money by:

- Lowering food costs—plant staples are cheaper than meat.
- Reducing healthcare expenses as plant-based diets improve common health issues.
- Cutting operational costs with less refrigeration and simplified meal prep.
- Decreasing climate-related expenses in line with Hawai'i's commitments.

NYC's public hospitals implemented this model in 2022, seeing majority patient acceptance, high satisfaction, and significant annual savings. Hawaii can set a national example adopting this proven method.

Thank you for your consideration,

Katherine Skow

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:40:16 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kencho Gurung	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the committee.

I am in strong support of the Plant-Based-by-Default Bill in our state institutions.

Plant-based-by-default simply means that plant-based meals are served automatically, while anyone who wants an animal-based meal can still request one. It preserves full choice while shifting the default to the most cost-effective and health-promoting option.

This policy saves money in four major ways.

First, food costs drop immediately. Staples like beans, lentils, rice, vegetables, and tofu cost far less than meat, which is one of the most expensive items in institutional budgets.

Second, healthcare costs decline. Incarcerated people and hospital patients have high rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity, all conditions that improve with plant-based diets, reducing medication use, ER visits, re-admissions, and costly medical transports.

Third, operational costs fall because plant-based meals require less refrigeration, reduce food-safety risks, and lower labor and equipment needs.

Finally, reducing meat consumption lowers climate-related costs and aligns with Hawai'i's climate commitments.

We also have strong real-world evidence. New York City's public hospital system adopted plant-based-by-default in 2022. Over 60% of patients chose the plant-based option, satisfaction exceeded 90%, and the system saved millions annually.

Hawai'i has the opportunity to lead the nation by applying this proven, cost-saving model across our institutions.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 3:50:44 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda Leveen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I fervently support this bill for all the goodness contained within... for our health, for kindness to animals and the earth, for preserving our world for future generations. Let's live on the side of peace and non-violence when it comes time to feed ourselves.

Mahalo,

Linda Leveen

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 5:03:58 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Anderson	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee and Members of the committee,

Please pass this important bill. It's a quadruple win: for human health, for planetary health, for decreasing animal suffering, and reducing costs to taxpayers.

Plant-based-by-default in our state institutions would mean that plant-based meals are the pre-selected option, although a person can request an animal-based meal. This maintains individual choice, but adds inclusiveness for people whose religious or ethical convictions disallow some or all animal foods, as well as for those who have health-based dietary restrictions like lactose intolerance.

This policy saves money:

Food costs drop: staples like beans, lentils, rice, vegetables, and tofu cost far less than meat. Animal meat is one of the most expensive items in institutional budgets.

Healthcare costs drop: Incarcerated people and hospital patients have high rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity. These conditions all improve with plant-based diets, reducing medication use, ER visits, re-admissions, and costly medical transports.

Operational costs drop: plant-based meals require less refrigeration, reduce food-safety risks, and lower labor and equipment needs.

Finally, reducing meat consumption lowers climate-related costs and aligns with Hawai'i's climate commitments.

New York City's public hospital system adopted plant-based-by-default in 2022: over 60% of patients chose the plant-based option, satisfaction exceeded 90%, and the system saved millions annually. Hawaii has the opportunity to lead the nation by applying this proven, cost-saving model across our institutions.

Please pass this bill.

Mahalo,

Victoria Anderson

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:48:26 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglas Jones	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the committee:

My name is Douglas Jones, and I am a professional exercise physiologist on the island of Kauai and have a regular newspaper column for over three years in The Garden Island Newspaper ("In Health & With Hope).

I am in strong support of the Plant-Based-by-Default Bill in our state institutions.

Plant-based-by-default simply means that plant-based meals are served automatically, while anyone who wants an animal-based meal can still request one. It preserves full choice while shifting the default to the most cost-effective and health-promoting option.

This policy saves money in four major ways.

First, food costs drop immediately. Staples like beans, lentils, rice, vegetables, and tofu cost far less than meat, which is one of the most expensive items in institutional budgets.

Second, healthcare costs decline. Incarcerated people and hospital patients have high rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity — all conditions that improve with plant-based diets, reducing medication use, ER visits, re-admissions, and costly medical transports.

Third, operational costs fall because plant-based meals require less refrigeration, reduce food-safety risks, and lower labor and equipment needs.

Finally, reducing meat consumption lowers climate-related costs and aligns with Hawaii's climate commitments.

We also have strong real-world evidence. New York City's public hospital system adopted plant-based-by-default in 2022. Over 60% of patients chose the plant-based option, satisfaction exceeded 90%, and the system saved millions annually.

Hawaii has the opportunity to lead the nation by applying this proven, cost-saving model across our institutions.

I appreciate your consideration and wish you a happy and healthy 2026.

In Health & With Hope,

Doug :-)

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:41:37 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matt Nelson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the committee. My name is Matt Nelson, and I am a Koa woodworker on Kauai.

I am in strong support of the Plant-Based-by-Default Bill in our state institutions.

Many men — especially those who work hard physically — are surprised to learn that plant-protein is now the preferred fuel for a growing number of elite athletes. NFL star **Deatrich Wise Jr.** follows a fully plant-protein diet to reduce inflammation and recover faster, saying the switch helped him minimize downtime and improve long-term health. If some of the strongest men in the country are choosing plant-protein meals for performance and recovery, it makes sense for our institutions to make these meals the easy default — especially because they **save money**. Plant-based meals lower food costs, reduce healthcare spending, and cut operational expenses, all while keeping full choice available for anyone who wants something different.

Thank you!

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:43:29 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paul Tibbetts	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill, it's good for the taxpayers, good for the planet, good for the animals it saves, and good for our health.

Sincerely, Paul T

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the House Labor & Public Employment Committee,

My name is Natalie Senyk, and I am a personal trainer and health coach on Kaua'i.

I strongly support the Plant-Based-by-Default Bill in our state institutions.

Plant-based-by-default means plant-based meals are served automatically, while anyone who wants an animal-based meal can still request one. It protects personal choice while improving the default in a practical, cost-effective way in state-run settings.

In my work, I see how powerfully food choices affect energy, blood sugar stability, recovery, and long-term health. From a health and prevention standpoint, this policy helps address the reality that many people in state institutions face high rates of chronic disease risk—like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity. Making the default meal option more fiber-rich and nutrient-dense can support better blood sugar control, cardiovascular health, and weight management, thereby reducing downstream healthcare utilization and costs.

This policy can also reduce food costs because plant-based staples are typically less expensive than meat, and it aligns with Hawai'i's climate and sustainability goals.

I respectfully urge you to support HB1874.

Thank you for your time,

Natalie Senyk

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:00:30 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace O'Neil	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Heart disease and stroke are some of the common chronic diseases In our country. Dr. Dean Ornish and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, have been able to fully reverse heart disease in their study subjects on a low-fat plant-based diet. With escalating healthcare costs, we have an obligation to prevent these chronic diseases from happening. The plant based diet should be the default option. Plant based diets are also significantly less expensive than animal based diets. Not only are they better for our wallet, they are also less expensive to the environment. Adopting this bill is the first step to creating a healthier Hawaii.

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:21:16 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrea Nandoskar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strongly support!

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR
Hearing on February 5, 2026 at 9:30 am

SUPPORTING HB 1874

My name is John Kawamoto, and I support HB 1874 because diet has an impact on health, the environment, and animal welfare.

A plant-based diet is healthier than the typical American diet because the typical American diet is high in saturated fats from beef, pork, and chicken, and is responsible for the high incidence of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer.

Diet also impacts the environment because it is estimated that the typical American diet requires about three acres of land to support it, whereas a plant-based diet requires only half an acre. Globally, forests are being cut down to accommodate the growing demand for beef, pork, and chicken. The deforested areas are being used for livestock farming and feed crop production.

Diet impacts animal welfare because the typical American diet depends on industrial animal production, which is cruel. For example, cows, pigs, and chickens are often kept in crowded, barren spaces. The cruelty goes on, and the horrors are so great that it would be unfit to describe them here.

This bill will be a step toward improving health, improving the environment, and improving animal welfare.

I urge the committee to pass the bill.

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 6:32:44 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancie Caraway	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayaa, ,Vice Chair Lee and Members of the Committee.

My name is Nancie Caraway. I am an educator and writer and I live in Honolulu.

The valuesI honor most as a citizen of Hawaii Nei - is our collective commitment to sustainability, the aina and the health and flourishing of our diverse people.

That is the reason I am strongly urging you to pass HB1874 **the PLANT-BASED-BY-DEFAULT BILL** before you today.

I realize this may be a difficult first step for you in achieving the values outlined above - but I am hoping you can support this important enhancement to our land and people.

By offering an option of having animal-meat meals to those who wish - the default of a plant/vegetarian meal will result in cost-savings, health-promoting and less harm done to farm animals in slaughterhouses.

Many municipalities and States have adoped this wise measure with many benefits.

Mahalo Nui Loa for your courage in allowing our keiki grow up healthy and compassionate.

Nancie Caraway, Ph.D

HB-1874

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:57:02 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/5/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doora Shin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I stand in strong support of this measure.

Mahalo,

Doora Shin