

These statements are my own and should not be construed as speaking for my place of employment or any professional organizations I may belong to.

At first this Bill sounded like a great idea, people should have access to their preferred food choices in these settings, and then I came to the statement that hospitals would be prohibited from serving 'processed meats'. It is ironic that a Bill whose overall goal is to facilitate choice would restrict the choices of the majority of patients.

I have been a Registered Dietitian for almost 25 years; first in long-term care and currently at a Behavioral Health (psychiatric) Hospital. Our hospital is included on the map showing the 59 (out of 68) hospitals in Oregon that currently offer plant-based meal options.

Unlike medical hospitals whose patients generally have stays lasting only a few days, our patients are admitted for months, years, and even decades for some. To be prevented from occasionally serving culturally appropriate foods such as a hot dog at the summer Friends and Family picnic, or ham at Easter and Christmas seems overly restrictive and intrusive. Note at these events vegetarian, vegan, and 'plain meat' options are always available. Our meals are based on the DASH (dietary approaches to stop hypertension) eating pattern. Our menus also include a weekly non-DASH meal such as pizza, both for patient satisfaction and to demonstrate that if your diet is generally healthy it is OK to have a favorite food on occasion. Most pizza toppings are 'processed meat', but the vegetarian/vegan alternatives for pepperoni, Canadian bacon, etc. are not necessarily lower in sodium or healthier than the actual processed meat.

There are already State and Federal regulations that require hospitals and other facilities to offer foods that are consistent with their patient's food preferences and health needs. Rather than focusing on such a narrow aspect of Oregon's population, I would encourage the supporters of this Bill to advocate for improving access to plant-based foods to traditionally underserved populations, initiate a robust public health campaign so that people might start incorporating more plant-based foods into their diet before they experience negative health consequences, support programs in schools that expose children to plant-based options that they might not see at home, and to advocate for additional funding for patients once they discharge home from a hospital in order to provide ongoing support as they try to incorporate/develop new healthy eating habits.