

Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson, Chair
Senate Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Opposition to HB 3342

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

As an Oregon Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, RDN, who has personally practiced plant-based eating patterns for 46 years, I am opposed to the narrow definition of plant-based eating as “vegan” in HB 3342. My concern is that the definition of “plant-based meals” as “vegan” in HB 3342 misrepresents the variety of healthful, plant-based eating patterns that are currently practiced.

I would like to assure the committee that Registered Dietitian Nutritionists, RDNs, support the benefits of vegetarian and vegan diets: “It is the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics that **appropriately planned** vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.” I believe that carefully planned (and followed) vegetarian or vegan diets may be helpful in the treatment of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.

Defining “plant-based meals” as “vegan” in statute limits the variety of choices that plant-based eating plans can offer. “Plant-based” and “vegan” are not interchangeable. A healthful plant-based eating pattern can be vegan, vegetarian, lacto-ovo-vegetarian, lacto-vegetarian, or ovo-vegetarian. For many people who are increasing their vegetables, fruits and whole grain servings and striving to eat more plant-based foods, it could be a “flexitarian” eating pattern that contains some animal foods or byproducts from meat, poultry, fish, dairy or eggs. The Mediterranean Diet, the DASH (dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) Diet and the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans provide successful examples of ways to incorporate plant-based eating that are not exclusively vegan.

My RDN colleagues working in hospitals and long term care facilities work with patients and their physicians to plan menus that ensure nutritional adequacy and meet the needs and preferences of patients. This includes accommodating allergies and intolerances, and religious, cultural and ethnic preferences. Options for plant-based meals are offered and encouraged, but are not limited by definition to “vegan” or plant only. Registered dietitian nutritionists can fulfill requests for plant-based meals in accordance with established national guidelines that are currently mandated.

I appreciate your consideration of this serious concern about the language of HB 3342 and my opposition to defining plant-based eating as “vegan.” I am eager to speak with the Chair and the Committee to discuss plant-based meals and answer further questions.

Sincerely,

Shannon Stember, RDN, LD