

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5131

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services, January 22, 2025

Title: An act relating to accommodating religious foods in state correctional facilities.

Brief Description: Accommodating religious foods in state correctional facilities. [**Revised for 1st Substitute:** Accommodating religious celebrations in state correctional facilities.]

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Chapman, Dhingra, Frame, Hasegawa, Nobles, Orwall, Saldaña, Stanford and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/14/25, 1/22/25 [DPS, DNP].

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Corrections to make reasonable efforts to accommodate religious celebrations in state correctional facilities.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5131 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Orwall and Warnick.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Christian, Ranking Member.

Staff: Kelsey-anne Fung (786-7479)

Background: Food Services Program. The Department of Corrections (DOC) has internal policies governing its food services program to provide cost-effective, healthy, and quality meals in compliance with health and safety requirements. Cycle menus are prepared by

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DOC's food service administrator and registered dietitian to assist in ensuring food service requirements are met. Cycle menus include menus for certain diets, religious guidelines, meal portions, and nutritional analysis, among other things.

Religious Diets. According to agency policy, individuals in custody at DOC have the opportunity to select an initial religious diet at no cost during orientation at reception. Recognized religious diets are vegetarian, halal, and kosher. To receive a religious diet, a request must be submitted to the chaplain or their designee. Requested religious diets remain in place until the person requests that it be removed or changed. After the initial religious diet selection at reception, the person will be charged a fee anytime the person changes to a religious diet.

Therapeutic Diets. Per DOC policy, individuals who may require a therapeutic diet are identified through the health examination process or a nutritional assessment performed by a registered dietician. Recommended therapeutic diets take precedence over a religious diet, unless the individual declines during the medical encounter. If the person does not decline, the therapeutic diet remains in effect until it expires and the religious diet will resume.

Meals for Events. Meals for religious, cultural, diversity, and family-centered events must follow certain DOC policies. If requested, light refreshments and special menu items such as meal enhancements must be funded by participants, or the sponsoring cultural, diversity, or religious faith group, or both, 45 days in advance of the event. Deliveries and donations must be coordinated with DOC food service managers.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): DOC must make reasonable efforts to accommodate religious celebrations in state correctional facilities.

Provision of a religious celebration meal must be made at no cost to the incarcerated person, excluding the religious celebration meal enhancement.

Reasonable efforts include, but are not limited to, coordination and arrangements with a partnering nonprofit organization in the provision and delivery of a religious celebration meal, including meal enhancements and donated foods. DOC may establish reasonable guidelines and deadlines for sponsorship and contribution of meal enhancements and donated foods, but no deadline may exceed 45 days before a religious celebration, barring any supply chain issues.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Changes references to religious diet to religious celebrations and religious celebration meals.
- Removes references to special menu items.
- Allows DOC to establish reasonable guidelines, in addition to deadlines, for

sponsorship and contribution of meal enhancement and donated foods and increases the deadline from 30 days to 45 days in advance of a religious celebration, barring any supply chain issues.

- Excludes religious celebration meal enhancements from the requirement to provide a religious celebration meal at no cost to the incarcerated person.
- Strikes language requiring DOC to provide a therapeutic diet that accommodates a requested religious diet.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: There have been instances with organizations that want to bring foods into institutions because of religious celebrations, but the incarcerated individual has to choose between a therapeutic diet and a religious diet. A person cannot have a therapeutic diet that also meets their religious needs. Supporting religious practices and traditions are positive benefits for everyone and it helps build community, support well-being, and reduces violence. Facilities are safer for staff and the incarcerated when opportunities are provided for individuals to participate in religious practices and celebrations that are meaningful to them while they are serving their sentence.

There have been instances where individuals of Jewish faith had to choose between having a religious diet and a medical diet. A kosher meal should actually meet the requirements of orthodox law according to the Jewish religion.

OTHER: Honoring and respecting the religious beliefs and practices of incarcerated individuals is integral to fostering a positive and rehabilitative environment. It is important for people to have that choice and have access to meals that align with their religious beliefs and practices. Some provisions of the bill would require significant resources.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Matthew Perry, Jewish Prisoner Services International.

OTHER: Danielle Armbruster, Department of Corrections; Jamie Dolan, Department of Corrections.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.