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Groundbreaking Report Interrogates the Relationship Between Food, Violence, and the Maryland Correctional Food System

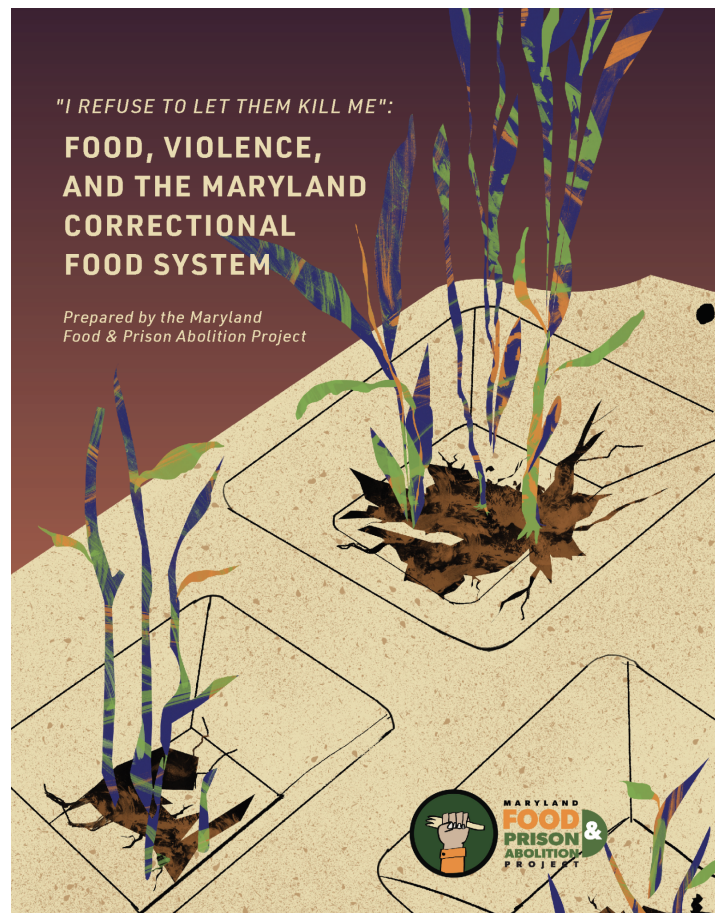
New Research Shines a Light on the Horrific Experience of Eating in Prison from the Perspectives of Currently and Formerly Incarcerated People

Baltimore, MD — On the 50th anniversary of the 1971 Attica prison uprising, the Maryland Food & Prison Abolition Project (MFPAP) is honored to announce the release of *"I Refuse to Let Them Kill Me": Food, Violence, and the Maryland Correctional Food System*. This first-of-its-kind report is MFPAP's capstone grassroots publication, written after conducting a two-year critical participatory action study uncovering the dehumanizing experience of eating while incarcerated.

"It's terrible. There's no care put into the food, into the cooking, no care, it's thrown together for large groups of people. No care is put into it. It's like they're feeding animals." — Kenneth, formerly incarcerated in Western Maryland

About "I Refuse to Let Them Kill Me": Food, Violence, and the Maryland Correctional Food System

From 2018 to 2020, the Maryland Food & Prison Abolition Project conducted over 80 individual interviews and dialogue circles with individuals currently and formerly incarcerated in prisons throughout the state. Our goals were to critically interrogate Maryland's industrialized correctional food system; the long-lasting impact of prison food on the physical and mental health of incarcerated individuals; and the relationship between prison food and food apartheid in communities outside of confinement.



Ultimately, this report uproots any notion that correctional food provision can be gradually reformed to create a “kinder, gentler” institution truly able to “meet the needs” of those held in captivity. Instead, we find that the weaponization of food as a tool to dehumanize and control further evidences how prisons cannot be transformed into anything beyond what they are—a warehouse of majority Black and brown bodies, brutalized and deemed disposable by the intersecting crises of anti-Black violence, racial capitalism, ableism and sanism, queer/transphobia, and heteropatriarchy that constitute the roots of carcerality itself.

“I don’t know if they was like cockroaches or mosquitoes or what, but [the food] had bugs in it... the greens. I mean, I couldn’t understand it... They [would not] throw the whole tray away, but I think they would just... dip out the bug and still serve it.” — M., formerly incarcerated in multiple Maryland prisons

“I Refuse to Let Them Kill Me”: *Food, Violence, and the Maryland Correctional Food System* uniquely centers incarcerated narratives to explore and uncover the dire implications of correctional food service, food provision, and a growing yet invisibilized public health and human rights crisis. Divided into six parts and spanning over 180 pages, the report reveals the workings of the Maryland carceral food system from an abolitionist lens—detailing, in part, the inhumane nature of prison meals and institutional kitchens; the use of food to control and punish; how private corporations profit from incarcerated folks’ hunger; the deadly impact of correctional meals on people’s health both inside and outside of confinement; and how prison food serves as a form of premature death. A breakdown of each part of the report is as follows:

Part 1: The Prison Eating Experience demonstrates how the day-to-day experience of eating in a Maryland prison is rooted in dehumanization.

Part 2: The Prison Industrial Food System details how institutional policies and procedures governing correctional food provision—including how meals are prepared, stored, and served—further compound the violence of eating in captivity.

Part 3: Prison Food, Health, and Premature Death examines the deadly impact of correctional food service on an incarcerated person’s physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.

Part 4: Changes in Food Provision Over Time and Space uncovers differences in correctional food in prisons throughout Maryland—with food service in Baltimore institutions being by far the worst.

Part 5: Food As A Tool of Violence, Punishment, and Dehumanization covers how food in prison is used as a direct form of violence, punishment, and dehumanization by transforming a person’s most basic need for nourishment into mechanisms of control.

Part 6: Food, Abolition, and Dismantling the Prison Food Industrial Complex discusses what can be done to dismantle the prison food industrial complex. First, we propose changes that can be taken within Maryland prisons to mitigate the violent experience of eating in confinement; second, we outline a set of “non-reformist reforms” to address the broader intersections between correctional food systems and structural forms of oppression.

The struggle for food sovereignty must, at its core, be an abolitionist endeavor. Access and ownership over the food we eat is one of our most basic rights. The creation of a world where

we all have power over food that physically, spiritually, and emotionally sustains us, heals us, and nourishes us cannot exist while prisons and all structures of violence and oppression still stand.

About The Maryland Food & Prison Abolition Project

The Maryland Food & Prison Abolition Project connects urban and small-scale farms to prisons to use food as a tool for liberation. By increasing amounts of fresh produce in Maryland prisons, we aim to pave the pathway for conditions for resistance on the inside and support communal forms of self-determination on the outside.

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