"I REFUSE TO LET THEM KILL ME":

FOOD, VIOLENCE, AND THE MARYLAND CORRECTIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

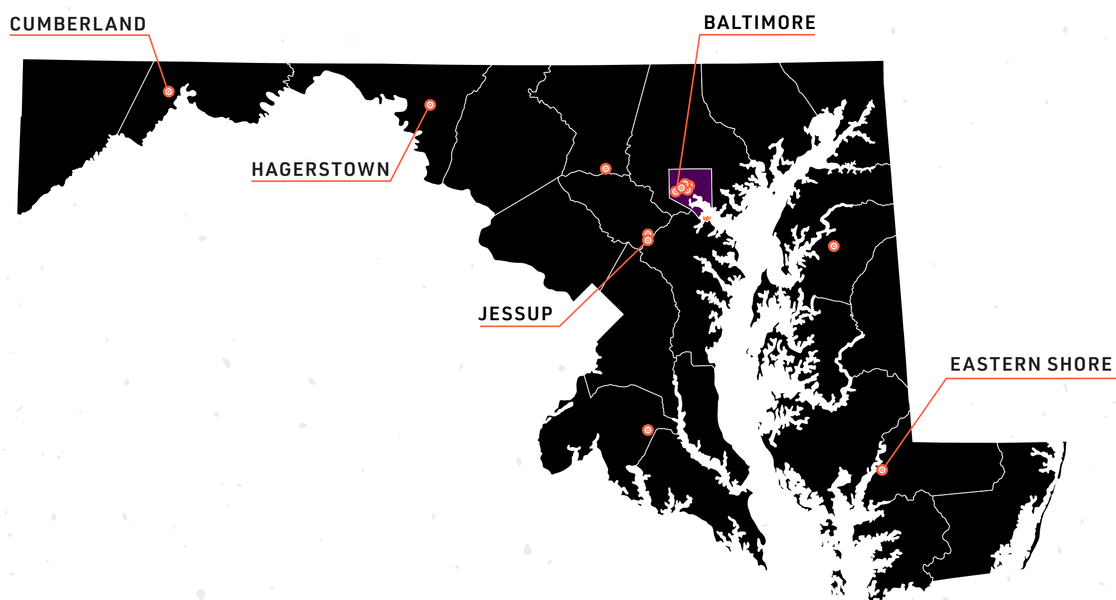
Prepared by the Maryland Food & Prison Abolition Project

PART IV

CHANGES IN FOOD PROVISION OVER TIME AND SPACE

In Parts 1 to 3 of this report, we refer to food provision in the 21 adult state-run prisons spread across Maryland's five regions in a more or less homogeneous manner. However, although the general logics, structures, and material conditions shaping correctional food service extend throughout the state, a multitude of factors—including a facility's physical location, the security level and purpose of the facility itself (i.e. pretrial, prelease, long-term confinement, etc.), institutional budgets, staff attitudes, and a facility's age and kitchen capabilities—significantly impact the experience of eating in a particular prison. Part 4 of this report thus explores differences in correctional food service on an institutional and state-wide level, as well as changes in food service over time. In particular, we concentrate on the differences between food conditions in Baltimore prisons—given the particular severity of food provision in the city's correctional facilities—and prisons located in the other four regions of the state.

As of 2018, the state of Maryland incarcerates over 18,000 adults across its 21 state-run correctional facilities.[163] The map below displays the number



of prisons per region—Baltimore, Hagerstown, Eastern Shore, Cumberland, and Jessup—with 6 prisons concentrated in a 1-mile complex in the heart of Baltimore City itself. Although some institutions in Baltimore confine individuals for longer periods of time, most of the city's prisons generally function for purportedly short-term purposes such as intake, pretrial, "inmate diagnosis," or pre-release. People are thus usually transferred out of their community post-sentencing to prisons located in oftentimes remote regions of the state—the implications of which are discussed further in this section.

GILMORE DEFINES A CRISIS AS INSTABILITY THAT CAN BE FIXED ONLY THROUGH RADICAL MEASURES, WHICH INCLUDE DEVELOPING NEW RELATIONSHIPS AND NEW OR RENOVATED INSTITUTIONS OUT OF WHAT ALREADY EXISTS.

In her book *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California,* Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes prisons as an "partial geographical solutions to political economic crises, organized by the state"—crises which produced surpluses of "finance capital, land, labor, and state capacity."[164] She uncovers the forces behind California's massive prison-building project from 1982 onwards—the largest such project in the history of the world—and points, in part, to rural economic collapse and deindustrialization as two factors leading to the 500% growth in the California state prisoner population between 1982 to 2000.[165]

MARYLAND'S PRISON POPULATION INCREASED BY 44% FROM 1983 TO 2015, AND THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN JAIL EXPLODED BY 258% FROM 1970 TO 2015.

While conducting an analysis of Maryland's state prison system from a geographical lens remains far beyond the scope of this report, there are a number of parallels between the expansion and character of prisons in California and the correctional landscape in Maryland. In providing a brief overview of the history, character, and spatialization of prisons in the state, we aim to provide further context

for how and why correctional food provision has assumed its current form—and how the city of Baltimore was and is instrumental in shaping the state's current carceral environment, reflected partly in the horrendous quality of food service in the city's facilities.

BETWEEN 1971 TO 1995, BALTIMORE BECAME—AND REMAINS TO THIS DAY—THE EPICENTER OF THE EXPANSION OF MARYLAND'S CARCERAL PROJECT.

As was the pattern throughout the country, incarceration rates in Maryland skyrocketed in the late 20th century. The state's prison population increased by 44% from 1983 to 2015, and the number of individuals in jail exploded by 258% from 1970 to 2015. While the state of Maryland built and operated 12 prisons in total from 1811 to 1970, an additional 13 prisons were constructed between 1971 to 1995 as a result of the growing numbers of people sentenced to confinement. More prisons were thus opened in a 24-year time period than were built in the entire 159 years from when the state's first penitentiary was erected—with 10 prisons opened in the single decade between 1981 to 1991. While Maryland's prison-building boom abated in the late 1990s, three additional prisons were constructed and populated from 1996 to 2017—one of which was a highly-protested $35 million dollar, 60-bed detention center constructed specifically for youth.

While the physical locations of the 13 prisons constructed between 1971 to 1995 were spread geographically throughout the state, Baltimore became—and remains to this day—the epicenter of the expansion of Maryland's carceral project. As Prison Policy Initiative writes, "while one out of 10 Maryland residents is from Baltimore, one out of three Maryland residents in state prison is from the city."[166] Furthermore, hyperincarceration in Baltimore is further concentrated within a handful of neighborhoods: five communities in particular experience the city's highest rates of incarceration, and in these communities, individuals' life expectancies are a *full 13 years shorter* than in communities with the city's lowest incarceration rates.[167] The racialized nature of these neighborhoods—all are predominantly Black—and the reproduction of such patterns in state prison systems throughout the country demonstrates, as has been extensively documented, the anti-Black core of mass incarceration and the criminalization of Blackness itself.

Though one-third of the individuals incarcerated in Maryland are from Baltimore, the vast majority of long-term adult correctional institutions in the state are situated outside the city—oftentimes in rural areas one or more hours away. The spatial arrangement of the state's institutions are an example of how, as Gilmore describes, prisons were sold to rural white America as a means to revive failing economies, in part by providing means for employment through construction and staffing.[168] For instance, the largest prison in Maryland—Eastern Correctional Institution—has a capacity of 3,380 and is situated in a town with a population of approximately 2,000; the majority of incarcerated individuals at ECI are Black (around 70%) while the town of Westover is majority white (also around 70%).[169] Somerset County, the county that Westover is located in, also ranks 24th out of all 24 Maryland counties in terms of income per capita.[170]

WHILE GROWING FOOD BEHIND BARS CERTAINLY DOES HAVE REMEDIAL BENEFITS, WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF DOING SO IN AN ENVIRONMENT DESIGNED TO STRIP INDIVIDUALS OF AGENCY AND THEIR VERY HUMANITY?

The rural location of many Maryland prisons has further implications on both food provision and the specific types of labor imprisoned people are forced to perform. A number of Maryland prisons have gardens and gardening programs, where incarcerated individuals can receive a horticultural classroom education and physically grow fruits and vegetables on a sectioned-off portion of land. While the state touts such programs as "rehabilitative"—in that they supposedly teach individuals useful skills for employment post-confinement, mitigate "aggression," and provide an outlet from the day-to-day routine of incarceration—the act of farming within prison cannot be separated from the logics of prison itself as well as historical and contemporary forms of prison agriculture. While growing food certainly does have remedial benefits, what are the implications of doing so in an environment designed to strip individuals of agency and their very humanity? Although Maryland does not utilize the same plantation-style agricultural system as other prisons throughout country—where majority Black prisoners are forced to work under conditions deeply reminiscent of slavery—the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services does operate programs that are extensions of such systems under the guise of "community service."[171] At ECI, for example,

imprisoned individuals are sent out to nearby farms for gleaning—defined as "the collection of crops either from farmers' fields that have already been mechanically harvested, or from fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest."[172] After gleaning—as well as with all produce grown within prison gardens—incarcerated folks are not actually allowed to eat any of the food they pick: produce is either given to correctional staff or donated to local or regional government agencies, nonprofits, or food banks. In FY 2019, ECI donated "over 10,054 pounds of vegetables" to the county health department and a food bank, and the Maryland Correctional Training Center, another institution in Hagerstown, donated 11,000 pounds of vegetables to similar organizations.[173]

We raise these examples not to advocate for a regression to a type of "self-sustaining" prison farm—where the food necessary to sustain the incarcerated population comes from internal agricultural production—but to illustrate two points. First, the rural location of some Maryland prisons has enabled the State to repackage clear extensions of historical forms of oppression into a means to reduce recidivism and even "benefit" imprisoned people. Second, prison labor is increasingly used to provide "hunger relief" for people in nearby communities—a troubling practice due to the almost constant hunger faced by currently incarcerated individuals as well as the high rates of "food insecurity" experienced by individuals after release from captivity. Such practices also further expose the wider intersections between prisons' dependencies on large food service corporations, themselves a driver of hunger, and more broadly the logics of racial capitalism that give rise, in part, to both global hunger and the US prison regime itself.[174]

CHANGES IN FOOD CONDITIONS OVER REGION

"THE BIGGER INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT AS BAD AS THE ONES IN THE CITY. BALTIMORE CITY JAIL IS THE WORST."

– ANDREW, FORMERLY INCARCERATED IN BALTIMORE

As horrendous as food conditions are in all Maryland correctional institutions, the experience of eating in a Baltimore facility is by far the worst. A number of Baltimore carceral institutions serve as pretrial detention centers, where individuals are confined and released at a much higher rate than in prisons across the state. For example, as Prison Policy Initiative reports, "at least 83,000 different people are booked into local jails in Maryland"—with Baltimore's incarceration rate at over three times the state average.[175] In our conversations, almost every single person imprisoned at a carceral institution both inside and outside of Baltimore spoke to the singularly dehumanizing state of food provision in the city. Due to factors such as the limited infrastructural capabilities of Baltimore kitchens; the "short-term" nature of the facilities; and differences in quality, quantity, and commissary, food conditions are so poor that—as one person put it—"a lot of people that's in the city wish they get to the bigger institution... just for the food alone."

Food Service Operations.

For the most part, correctional institutions outside of Baltimore prepare their meals from "scratch" within the facility itself. In Baltimore, however, meals for the thousands of people confined across the city's carceral complex are usually prepared in a central kitchen located in one institution. For example, the Metropolitan Transition Center, or MTC—formerly known as the Maryland Penitentiary—mass produces meals for not just the 1000+ individuals held within the facility, but for five other nearby institutions as well. As of early 2020, MTC produced more than 3,000 food trays per meal for delivery to facilities including the Youth Detention Center; Baltimore City Correctional Center; Maryland

Reception, Diagnostic and Classification Center; and Baltimore Central Booking and Intake Center. While some of these institutions do have limited kitchen capabilities and supplement partially-formed delivered meals with their own foods, others merely prepare and serve trays as they are received—sometimes after reheating, and oftentimes without.

Regardless if trays are reheated or not, meals in Baltimore's prisons are almost always cold by the time they are actually served. In some institutions, people are tossed food trays through a slot in their cell door as opposed to eating in a dining hall. Alongside the incredibly dehumanizing aspect of eating in this manner, the long gaps in time from when food is reheated to "delivered" to individuals' cells make meals even more inedible. As A., who was held in Central Booking for a year, described, "Everything is cold. You will not get a hot meal. I mean they might start out hot, but by the time you get [it], it gets cold... And then, a lot of it is not cooked. So, if you eating something that is half done, then it's not going taste the way it would taste if it was fully done." The scarcity of hot food is also in direct violation of DPSCS's own Food Services Manual, where it claims that "dietary staff shall provide three meals – including two hot meals, provided at regular meal times during each 24-hour period."[176]

"[CORRECTIONAL STAFF] CONSTANTLY TOLD ME NOBODY CARED. I HAD TO CONSTANTLY TELL MYSELF, BE GRATEFUL. AT LEAST YOU PUTTING SOMETHING ON YOUR STOMACH, BE GRATEFUL AND IT COULD BE WORSE. IT COULD BE WORSE... IT COULD BE NOTHING. [WHILE] OTHER PEOPLE HAVE, I NEVER FOUND ANY RODENTS IN MY MEALS, BUT IT KIND OF MADE ME FEEL LIKE YOU WAS EATING THE RODENTS ANYWAY."

– MARK, FORMERLY INCARCERATED IN PRISONS IN BALTIMORE

Due to the limitations of kitchen capabilities, a number of Baltimore prisons rely on bagged lunches in addition to serving half- or fully-prepared "hot" meals from MTC. The contents of these bags are generally the same as in other facilities across the state—their frequency, however, is much greater in the city. For many people, bagged meals are the first and sometimes only food they are served for weeks after entering prison. D., who was incarcerated in a few Baltimore institutions, told us: "All you was getting was bagged lunch. Soon as you coming in, the whole first week or two in there, you getting bagged lunches. Soon as you get incarcerated." And in describing the

actual contents of the bag, A. recounted: "When you get your bag, your bag is wet—the juices from the lunch meat is soaking its way through the bag, so yeah, the bag's all wet. And then, it's smashed, so it's like they put them together real quick and put them all in one pile, and when it's time for you to get it, they just throwing it off their cart."

"You got a piece of fruit in that bag," A. continued. "You have a carton of juice, and a pack of cookies. The cookies is in a plastic bag, but everything in that bag tastes like that lunch meat, and something is not right... Everything you get in that bag, believe me, it taste like that lunch meat, down to the juice." Consuming these meals for days and weeks on end inevitably has impacts on individuals' health—discussed later on in this section.

In addition to cold trays and bagged, unpalatable meals, the external preparation and delivery of meals also impacts people's ability to replace poor-quality foods and receive extra portions. As described in Parts 2 and 3 of this report, the state often serves spoiled, contaminated, or expired food items during meals. In Baltimore, people we spoke with expressed how meals in the city tend to be both smaller in size than in other regions as well as more likely to be spoiled. However, as meals are prepared off-site, individuals aren't able to receive replacement for spoiled foods or ask for more or less of certain items. People are thus left with no choice but to consume the food on their tray or in their bag—especially for individuals with no access to commissary—even if that means eating or drinking items that have clearly gone bad.

In speaking to this, Lawrence, a person incarcerated in institutions inside and outside the city, detailed: "Baltimore City... wasn't doing it. Your food was cold. It was cold. If it was mold and stuff on the bread and all that, that's what you got. Or you got cereal with milk in the carton that was the day before expiration or the expiration date was on it. You wasn't getting nothing extra or nothing... not even extra, what you deserve to have or what you was entitled—not deserved—entitled to have. [Other prisons] at least made sure your food was, not hot, but warm."

Short-term vs. Long-term Facilities.

The transient nature of incarceration in Baltimore's correctional institutions compared to those across Maryland also significantly impact the experience of eating in confinement. As mentioned earlier in this section, Baltimore's

incarceration rate is three times that of Maryland—an unsurprising statistic given that the anti-Black violence is fundamental to the foundation and perpetuation of prisons and other carceral institutions.[177] As a report from Justice Policy Institute highlights, “Maryland is the worst state in the nation when it comes to incarcerating people who are Black,” with incarceration rates “easily eclipsing the next closest states—Mississippi, South Carolina and Georgia.”[178]

BALTIMORE PRISON KITCHENS UNDER TRINITY WERE PURPORTEDLY FILLED WITH “RODENTS, INSECTS, AND BIRDS.” SUCH ATROCIOUS CONDITIONS ARE NOT UNIQUE TO TRINITY: THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, PRIVATE FOOD SERVICE CONTRACTORS SUCH AS ARAMARK HAVE COME UNDER FIRE FOR THEIR PARASITIC PRACTICES OF EXACERBATING AND PROFITING OFF OF HUMAN SUFFERING.

While most jails and detention centers are controlled by local governments, Baltimore’s carceral institutions have been operated by the state of Maryland since 1991. Of the six prisons run by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services in Baltimore, two operate as pretrial facilities; one is a youth detention center; one doubles as both an “intake and classification” center and a space to confine “pretrial detainees charged with notices of infractions”; one is designated for pre-release and work release; and one is a pretrial institution for individuals who have been charged with federal-level “crimes.”[179] In short, the majority of the correctional facilities in Baltimore are constructed to cage people for shorter-term purposes such as pre-trial detention, “classification," or pre-release. Following sentencing, individuals are shipped off to longer-term institutions outside of the city.

The short-term functions of Baltimore’s prisons present a unique set of challenges regarding food provision. Though all Maryland correctional institutions are chronically understaffed, staff turnover remains especially high in Baltimore—partly because staff may not be as dependent on jobs in corrections as they are in more rural areas.[180] As is to be expected, staff shortages have a major impact on every aspect of food service from storage

and preparation to distribution.

Issues with staff retention also stem from the transfer of food provision from private control to public in 2015. As described in the introduction of this report, food services in Baltimore correctional facilities were managed by a private vendor—Trinity Services Group—until the State terminated their contract due to gross mismanagement. As revealed during a state investigation, Baltimore prison kitchens under Trinity were purportedly filled with "rodents, insects, and birds."[181] Such atrocious conditions are not unique to Trinity: throughout the country, private food service contractors such as Aramark have come under fire for their parasitic practices of exacerbating and profiting off of human suffering.[182] As detailed by a correctional staff person in Baltimore, switching from a private vendor to a public system was a laborious process that, as of early 2020, was still not fully complete. Given the difficulties with such a transition, a number of correctional staff chose to transfer to another position within the prison system or leave their jobs altogether.

The lower quality of food in Baltimore's correctional facilities is also reflective of the overall worsened conditions in detention centers as opposed to prisons. Partially due to the higher rates of people entering and leaving confinement, detention centers are more likely to be chaotic, violent, overcrowded, as in MTC and the Baltimore Central Booking and Intake Center, and deplete of any "rehabilitative" programming prisons may offer—as rare as such programs may be.[183] Worsened physical conditions—especially in older facilities such as MTC, which was constructed in 1811—also mean that Baltimore facilities are more likely to be overrun by rats, mice, and other vermin. Rat infestations, according to correctional staff, are one reason why institutions in the city serve even less fresh produce than in institutions around the state: fresh produce has the potential to attract more pests, especially given facilities' poor storage conditions.

COMPARED TO PRISONS, JAILS AND DETENTION CENTERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE CHAOTIC, VIOLENT, OVERCROWDED, AND DEPLETE OF ANY "REHABILITATIVE" PROGRAMMING PRISONS MAY OFFER—AS RARE AS SUCH PROGRAMS MAY BE.

As individuals are oftentimes awaiting sentencing in jails and transferred to other institutions if convicted, detention centers espouse a larger climate of disposability as compared to prisons. Such a mentality is reflected, for instance, in both the lack of care in bagged meals as well as the dehumanizing act of serving meals to people through a slot in their cell door. In addition, given the relationship between food provision and maintaining "order," Baltimore detention centers—due in part to their transient nature—serve even smaller portion sizes as compared to institutions across Maryland. As H., who was formerly imprisoned in a number of state prisons, told us: "The bigger institutions, you get a little more than you get at the Baltimore City jails. So, I would say, okay, on spaghetti night, you would get, okay, say a serving spoon and a half. The city only give you one. That's it or you might just get a half in the city. But, in the bigger institutions, they going to make sure you get a larger portion because of the amount of people that they have to deal with... to keep them quiet, they have to give them the right amount of food."

THE INCREASING CONSOLIDATION OF CORRECTIONAL FOOD SERVICE CORPORATIONS MEANS THAT WHEN FACED WITH CLEAR EVIDENCE OF OVERT HARM AND CORRUPTION, STATE ADMINISTRATORS TEND TO MERELY SUBSTITUTE ONE PROFIT-HUNGRY VENDOR WITH ANOTHER.

A glimpse into the now-closed Baltimore City Detention Center (or BCDC) offers an example of how incredibly violent, corrupt, and dehumanizing conditions in city carceral institutions actually were—and, despite the closure of BCDC, still are. In 2015, the Governor of Maryland chose to shut down BCDC due to its "disgraceful" and "horrendous" conditions.[184] According to a 2015 lawsuit against the State of Maryland filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, the jail operated as a "dank and dangerous place, where detainees are confined in dirty cells infested with vermin."[185] Furthermore, as the Guardian writes, the "appalling sanitation, vermin, dirt and mold combined with a lack of basic medical care... possibly caused at least seven deaths in the last two years and continues to put thousands of detainees, mostly African American, at risk of serious danger."[186]

MANY PEOPLE FIND THE FOOD IN BALTIMORE'S PRISONS TO BE SO UNPALATABLE THAT THEY SIMPLY STOP EATING. OTHER TIMES, THE FOOD CAUSES SUCH A STRONG PHYSICAL REACTION THAT PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO EAT EVEN IF THEY WANTED TO.

While providing a deeper history of the case against BCDC is outside of the scope of this report, we note that the historical origins leading to the closure of the institution began in a lawsuit first filed in 1976—almost 40 years before the facility was finally shut down.[187] And beyond the fact that closing one facility does not change the core logics of violence and dehumanization equally intrinsic to every other prison, an ACLU lawyer in 2015 pointed to how shutting down BCDC could actually make things even worse. As Elizabeth Alexander described, "Since I have no reason to suspect that medical care is better in any other local correctional facility, I am greatly concerned that the short-term effects of closure, absent the most careful planning and reform, will exacerbate the medical and mental health failures to which detainees are subjected."[188]

Commissary.

While Baltimore state-run correctional facilities no longer outsource institutional food provision to private corporations, commissary services are still managed by Keefe Group—the same private vendor responsible for commissary in all Maryland prisons. Ironically, the parent company of Trinity Services Group—H.I.G. Capital—announced a year after Maryland rescinded Trinity's contract that they would be acquiring Keefe Group: a merger that was estimated to bring in $875 million per year for the company. As demonstrated in similar cases throughout the country, the increasing consolidation of correctional food service corporations means that when faced with clear evidence of overt harm and corruption, state administrators tend to merely substitute one profit-hungry vendor with another.[189]

As detailed in Part 1 of this report, incarcerated folks depend heavily on commissary for respite from the grossly dehumanizing and generally abhorrent state of institutional food provision in Maryland's prisons. At the same time, commissary is a site of deep exploitation: private commissary vendors both contribute to and profit off of the death-inducing nature of eating in confinement. Furthermore, private food service providers such as Aramark oftentimes control both institutional food provision as well as

commissary services in a single facility—thus, as described by an imprisoned person named Kevin 'Rashid' Johnson, simultaneously starving and exploiting incarcerated individuals.[190]

In Baltimore, commissary services are more limited compared to institutions in other Maryland regions. Although Keefe sets prices and standardizes commissary offerings uniformly on a state level, individual institutions still have the power to restrict or limit people's ability to purchase certain goods. Furthermore, Baltimore facilities don't have the same infrastructural capabilities as longer-term institutions for individuals to actually prepare commissary foods. A., who was incarcerated in two prisons in the city, elaborated: "The best meal in the jail... the very best meal is when you go to commissary and you get your noodles, and your tuna fish, and your sardines, and your pickles, and you make your own little hook up. That's the best meal in the jail. That's any jail. The big jail, the jail in the city. But the jail in the city is the worst because you can't get the hot water like you need, so you eating half done noodles."

AS NOTED IN PART 3, WE PUT THE WORD "CRIME" IN QUOTATIONS GIVEN THE NOTION OF CRIME AND INNOCENCE THEMSELVES AS ANTI-BLACK CONSTRUCTS.

Impacts on Health.

In addition to the creation and exacerbation of health conditions and chronic illnesses outlined in Part 3 of this report—such as diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension—individuals imprisoned in Baltimore face an additional set of health-related consequences due to the shock of first being placed into bondage. For example, many people find the food in Baltimore's facilities to be so unpalatable that they simply stop eating. Other times, the food causes such a strong physical reaction that people are unable to eat, even if they wanted to. As A. put it, "When I was first in there, that [food] had my stomach folded up... I wouldn't eat that [food] because every time I ate it, it would make my stomach lock up, ball up, and be hurting. So I stop eating. I wasn't used to that [food]."

While individuals confined in both Baltimore institutions and prisons throughout the state may share a constant sense of hunger, food provision in the two spaces can have different effects on weight. As detailed earlier

in this report, the state's overreliance on starch and other highly processed, nutritionally bankrupt foods leads many imprisoned individuals throughout Maryland to gain weight while incarcerated. In our conversations with folks formerly incarcerated in Baltimore, however, a number of people we spoke with initially lost significant amounts of weight during their time held captive in the city. "I went from 135 to 127 — and that was just the first week," A. recounted. "When I first went in, the only things I was eating... I was drinking the juices and probably eat the cookies, but the meals I would give away. I wouldn't eat that. I lost weight immediately. My stomach shrank. And this is not the environment for anybody to be losing any weight... you don't have no room to be losing weight or losing strength."

Another person we spoke with, J., shared a similar experience. "I ate because I was hungry," he said. "If I had a choice, I wouldn't have eaten. I lost weight there. I think the worst thing was what we called sweaty meat sandwich, which is baloney. A lot of times we just didn't eat it. When you first get there, you're hungry, you're starving, you might be withdrawing from something. So you've got put something in your stomach and you'll eat. I ate maybe the first week, the baloney sandwiches, after that we would go hungry before we eat it, because it comes in a ... it's been there too long."

As is the case in all Maryland prisons, food service in Baltimore's carceral institutions ultimately comprises a form of premature death. Yet unlike state-run institutions in other parts of Maryland, this "collateral consequence" of confinement in Baltimore impacts individuals who have not even been formally convicted of a "crime." Due to the nature of the city's institutions, the majority of people held in Baltimore are "pretrial detainees"—or those who have been arrested but have not yet had a trial—and are thus legally classified as "innocent." As the Prison Policy Initiative writes, "many [people] are jailed pretrial simply because they can't afford money bail, others because a probation, parole, or ICE office has placed a "hold" on their release." Nationally, "the number of people in jail pretrial has nearly quadrupled since the 1980s."[191]

While breaking down the profoundly oppressive and anti-Black roots of pretrial detention and bail; the criminalization of poverty; and the relationship between carceral capitalism, the bail bond industry, and predatory lending are outside the scope of this report, we highlight that as of mid-2020, roughly 33% of people in Baltimore detention centers were

confined without the possibility to post bail at all.[192] In 2017, Maryland passed legislation to reform the use of cash bail to—as The Appeal reports—purportedly "make the state's criminal legal system less harsh on poor defendants."[193] By eliminating excessive cash bail, the logic went, less people would be sentenced to pretrial detention merely as a consequence of being unable to afford the fees needed for their freedom. However, studies have shown that these reforms have actually backfired. Instead of keeping people out of jail, "judges have opted to hold more people without bond instead of releasing them on their own recognizance."[194]

We highlight the intersections between pretrial detention and financial exploitation to further demonstrate how blatantly fictitious the notion of "innocent until proven guilty" truly remains. As noted earlier in this report, research shows that a person can experience long-term negative health outcomes after just four weeks of eating unhealthfully. In Baltimore, people can officially be confined in a carceral institution for up to three years—translating to over 3,000 meals served before a person is released or transferred to a different institution. Consequently, the violence of prison food—and the traumatizing nature of captivity in general—is enacted upon any individual caught up in the criminal punishment system, regardless of whether the state has classified them as "guilty."[195] Thus, simply being marked as a target for exploitation and a subject for disposability by the state—no matter what the legal outcome—can be enough to induce death.

CHANGES OVER TIME

"EARLY WHEN I FIRST STARTED GOING TO PRISON, WE WOULD GET FRUIT. APPLES. GRAPEFRUIT. NOW... AS THE YEARS WENT BY, NO FRUIT. NOT TOO MUCH FRUIT. YOU MAY GET AN ORANGE HERE AND THERE, BUT NOT TOO MUCH FRUIT NO MORE."

– R., FORMERLY INCARCERATED IN MULTIPLE PRISONS

One part of the logics of criminal justice reform assumes that over time, as greater attention is brought to the violent, dehumanizing, and exploitative reality of imprisonment—and incarceration itself as a system of racial control—correctional institutions can transform into "benevolent" spaces that center rehabilitation and provide "care" for the people in their custody. In our conversations with currently and formerly imprisoned folks, individuals laid bare the fallacy of such logics: instead of improving, food conditions in correctional facilities have gotten significantly worse over the past few decades. Campaigns to "tweak armageddon"—as Rachel Herzing puts it—are accordingly not only generally ineffective in improving conditions on the inside, but can in fact "limit possibilities for change."[196] She writes: "A focus on conditions of confinement... can lend support to a liberal-reformist agenda proposing that if specific violations or abuses are addressed, prisons have the potential to function as positive, useful institutions."[197] Analyzing food conditions in confinement from a longer historical trajectory thus allows us to situate food provision as a reflection, extension, and continuation of the inherent violence of systems of carcerality.

As discussed in the introduction to this report, the growth of the U.S prison regime occurred in tandem with the dismantling of the welfare state and a transformation of the role of the state itself. As Jackie Wang writes in *Carceral Capitalism*, the "legitimate function" of government changed in the 1960s onward from a "provider of social services to [a] provider of security"—contributing to the racialized mass criminalization of hundreds of thousands of people.[198] Prisons were thus faced with a crisis of scale as they attempted to feed the record numbers of individuals entering state

control on decreasing or stagnant budgets. At the same time, local, state, and national food systems were undergoing a larger transformation in the ways in which food was produced and distributed. The second half of the 20th century saw the increasing centralization and consolidation of food production in the hands of large agribusiness corporations. In order to address their crises of scale, prisons across the country either turned food service over to such corporations or centralized and industrialized food provision in-house to feed the millions of people held in captivity.

The transformation of the function of the state into a provider of security, on the one hand, and reduced state spending for prison food provision, on the other, may seem like a contradiction. If more public spending is going toward carceral institutions, shouldn't correctional dietary costs also increase? However, this contradiction can be resolved by examining where state funding for prisons is actually spent. In Maryland, instead of providing "welfare" for the incarcerated population, funds are deployed for costs such as prison construction, jobs, custodial care, and privatized healthcare through Corizon. On average, Maryland state-run correctional institutions spend barely 7% of their annual budget on dietary services—including salaries for dietary staff as well as raw food costs.[199] For example, the Baltimore City Correctional Center spent just over $1 million on dietary services in FY 2019, while the total annual budget for the facility was about $16 million.[200] And looking at total spending outside of physical prisons themselves, as Prison Policy Initiative explains, Maryland's corrections system consumes almost $1 billion dollars in public taxpayer funds every year.[201] Given the consistent—if not rising—levels of "food insecurity" in the United States from the 1970s onward, state spending thus simultaneously produces hunger both inside and outside of correctional institutions, with Black and low-income communities impacted the most.[202]

ON AVERAGE, MARYLAND STATE-RUN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS SPEND BARELY 7% OF THEIR ANNUAL BUDGET ON DIETARY SERVICES—INCLUDING SALARIES FOR DIETARY STAFF AS WELL AS RAW FOOD COSTS.

As prisons in the state of Maryland centralized and industrialized their food service operations, the quality of meals inevitably decreased. While providing a comparative analysis of food provision before and after the explosion of Maryland's prison population is outside of the scope of this report, researchers and advocates across the country point to the deteriorating effects of industrialization on food in prisons. For example, Impact Justice's report 'Eating Behind Bars' describes how prior to the 1970s, "individual prisons [had] near complete control over what to buy, cook, and serve, with quality ranging from meals that [were] relatively good... to those that [were] inedible."[203] Post-1970s, prison food—whether privatized or self-operated—became increasingly characterized by its highly or ultra-processed nature, nearly non-existent nutritional value, lack of fresh produce, and general unpalatability.

On a larger scale, the effects of the industrialization of prison food are closely linked to the hyper-industrialization of our global food regime as a whole. As described by scholar Anthony Hatch in 'Billions Served: Prison Food Regimes, Nutritional Punishment, and Gastronomical Resistance,' modern food production and distribution is structured under a "a grossly bifurcated food system that provides abundant animal proteins, fresh fruits, and vegetables to the world's wealthy populations while perpetual food crises and high prices recur in the lives of billions of global working and poor populations."[204] It is under this backdrop that state correctional departments adapted their food systems in the era of mass incarceration—and paved the way for corporations like Aramark and Trinity to seize opportunities to profit from bondage.

K., a person we spoke with who has been confined in a Maryland prison for over 30 years, detailed their first-hand observations with changes in the state's correctional food system over time. "Did there used to be more fresh foods back in the day compared to now? It used to be a lot of food, period," they told us. "Not just fresh fruit. It was a lot more food and the portions were bigger. We used to have these real big ladles to get everything out with and now the ladle... the little thing is... I'm like, 'What is this?' They say, 'Oh you get four ounces this. Or you get eight ounces this.' And I'm looking like, 'That don't even look like eight ounces.' And they don't even fill it to the top. They just do it half way and then they say it's eight ounces. I'm like, 'Wait a minute. That's not eight ounces. That's not even full.'"

The majority of the people we talked to to learn about the experience of eating in confinement were formerly or currently incarcerated in a Maryland state prison from the late-1970s to early 2020. Every individual who had either been incarcerated in one facility for dozens of years—such as K.—or who were imprisoned at different facilities over different periods of time detailed the consistent decline of food quality throughout their time behind bars. In general, people highlighted three points in time that marked more significant changes in food provision: the late 1980s and early 1990s; 2007 and 2008; and 2020.

Mid-1980 to early 1990s.

While incarceration rates in Maryland started rising in the 1970s, the state's prison and population grew exponentially from the mid-1980s onward.[205] The increasing numbers of people entering the criminal justice system—combined with low budgets for food provision and a general mindset embracing punishment and suffering for incarcerated people—caused the already-poor food quality to plummet. In 1991, Maryland took control over the now-demolished Baltimore City Jail, due in part to staff corruption and its especially dehumanizing conditions.

Early 2000s and the Great Recession.

The exponential growth of incarceration in Maryland hit its peak around the middle of the first decade of the century.[206] Food provision continued to decline during this time: as one person told us, "When I went back in 2000, the food was different. The portions was different, but the quality was pretty much the same. When I left and came back in 2008, it got even worse. That's when they started saying, "It's budget cuts. Budget cuts."

The financial crisis of 2007-2008 also contributed to changes in food service in Maryland. States across the country responded differently to the crisis in terms of state correctional spending, with some states cutting correctional budgets, reducing staff, and/or closing prisons altogether.[207] In Maryland, the percentage of the state budget allocated for corrections decreased from 2007 to 2011—partly as a result of increasing fiscal pressure due to the recession.[208] A number of currently and formerly incarcerated people we spoke with described how portion sizes were reduced drastically around this time, leading to increased hunger. As one currently incarcerated person put it: "They cut back. They call themselves making changes, and they made the change, but the change is for the worse because they cut back."

2012 and Keefe Group.

Until 2012, commissary services in Maryland's prisons were publicly operated. The actual commissary was oftentimes located within the prison itself, and a number of correctional staff were in charge of managing fulfillment and distribution of purchased goods. In 2012, however, commissary was privatized and outsourced to the Keefe Group, partly due to corruption and increased instances of "contraband." The decision to privatize also occurred due to staffing shortages—prisons in Maryland are chronically understaffed, and commissary workers were shifted to other functions post-outsourcing.

When Keefe took over commissary for all Maryland state-run prisons, prices for goods immediately shot up. L., who was incarcerated during the switch, recounted: "2012 or 2013. That was when they changed out the commissary supplier, and things was totally different. Prices literally tripled... It used to be that you could go to commissary, spend $50, and look like Santa Claus coming down. Now you go spent $50, you think somebody just was holding their shoulder. They've got a bag, $150 bag, because the prices went up." For example, L., described how a pack of noodles "went from 21 cents to 60 cents"—and for goods that remained the same price, the actual quantity of food went down.

In 2015, Maryland state auditors conducted an investigation into the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services' multi-million dollar contract with Keefe.[209] After the investigation, the auditors concluded that the agency constructed the procurement process in a way that "stifled competition and limited the bidding to a single company."[210] Due to the multiple services required from vendors (commissary, the provision of "inmate welfare kits," and the development of an "information technology system"), the state only received one bid—from Keefe.[211] As stated by the president of AFSCME Maryland, a labor union advocating for state workers, the deal reeked of "cronyism and doling out favors to the private prison industry."[212]

The relationship between private commissary providers—an integral component of the prison-industrial complex—and the State is one predicated on control, exploitation, and the extraction of time and capital from an imprisoned population and their loved ones. As demonstrated in Maryland, the profit and/or revenue-driven dimensions of carcerality are by no means

limited to the private parasites leeching off of captivity. As a neoliberal formation, the State itself facilitates the accumulation of capital for multi-million or billion dollar entities—all the while generating its own revenue in the process. For example, in the case of Keefe Group in 2012, the state of Maryland was estimated to generate $16 million in revenue from the contract over a period of five years. And while the data is not readily available in Maryland, a study of commissary spending in three other states—Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington—shows that food purchases are, by far, commissary providers' number one source of profit.[213]

2020 and COVID-19.

As dehumanizing as prison food conditions were prior to 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has made things significantly worse. While the majority of our conversations with formerly and currently incarcerated persons occurred before the pandemic, reports from states across the country detail the horrendous toll COVID has taken on correctional food provision.

In general, prisons have become ground zero for COVID-19: the Marshall Project asserts that as of December 2020, 1 out of every 5 incarcerated individuals had contracted the virus at some point.[214] In response to the pandemic, prisons across the country have placed incarcerated individuals on lockdown, where individuals are trapped in their cells for at least 23 hours a day for months on end. Prisons have also increasingly turned to solitary confinement as a means to combat the spread of the virus—a tortuous and inhumane practice that may actually worsen COVID-19 transmission.[215]

Examples of prisons in Texas and Virginia demonstrate the impact of lockdown procedures on correctional food provision. In Texas, incarcerated individuals were (and may continue to be) served meals unfit for an animal—much less a human being—while simultaneously not receiving enough food to survive. As one person told the Marshall Project, ""We will not die by COVID19 but we die by hunger!! TRUTH!"[216] Institutional meals were replaced by "johnny sacks," or bagged meals typically consisting of "two sandwiches each—some combination of a chicken or beef patty, mystery meat or peanut butter which prisoners report is sometimes watered down with cooking oil."[217] And in Virginia, incarcerated individuals were served foods antithetical to their medical needs—while medical care was reported to be "worse than ever."[218] As the loved one of an incarcerated person

expressed: "They're killing my husband! That's the way I feel."[219]

Prison food conditions in Maryland during COVID-19 have deteriorated significantly as well. Earlier in 2021, we set out to learn how correctional food provision in the state changed as a result of the pandemic. People currently or formerly incarcerated in prisons across Maryland detailed how eating in confinement exacerbated the impacts of being trapped in a cell during COVID-19—from experiencing drastic weight loss or weight gain due to even smaller portion sizes and starch-heavy meals; to eating meals sitting on toilets in crowded cells; to being served bagged meals for weeks at a time or cold, tasteless slop on dirty meal trays; to prisons stopping the service of health-specific or religious diets all together; to the development of even harsher health conditions such as ulcerative colitis or Hepatitis B; to an increased dependency on commissary for survival, leading commissary providers to engage in price-gouging; to using food to mentally dissociate or escape from the lived reality of being locked up in a space designed for coronavirus to spread freely. Our findings are documented in a zine titled 'Violence, Hunger, and Premature Death: How Prison Food in Maryland

> **"NOBODY EATS THIS FOOD. IT'S RANCID, IT'S HORRIBLE. AND IT GOT EVEN WORSE DURING COVID. YOU GET NO FRESH VEGETABLES. EVERYTHING IS STARCH, LIKE 90% OF THE MEAL. THERE'S NOTHING TO HELP BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM, NOTHING TO NOURISH YOU... WHEN YOU'RE GETTING FED SHIT, YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM IS DOWN, YOUR MORALE IS DOWN. YOU'RE GETTING FED SLOP. EVEN DOGS LOOK FORWARD TO THEIR MEALS. YOU'RE LOCKED IN A CAGE AND CAN ONLY COME OUT FOR 15 MINUTES A DAY. AND YOU CAN EITHER SHOWER OR CALL YOUR FAMILY... YOU'RE BEING TREATED LIKE AN ANIMAL. AND I ACTUALLY GOT COVID THIS PAST OCTOBER. ALL THEY DID WAS LOCK YOU DOWN, PUT YOU IN A CELL BY YOURSELF, AND CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE. THEY WOULDN'T EVEN GIVE YOU A TYLENOL OR ANYTHING. I KNOW A COUPLE OF PEOPLE THAT DIED IN THERE BECAUSE THEY WEREN'T GETTING ANY TYPE OF MEDICAL TREATMENT. THEY SAID THEY WANTED TO MONITOR MY SYMPTOMS. THEY WOULDN'T GIVE YOU ANYTHING TO ALLEVIATE THE PAIN OR MAKE YOU FEEL ANY BETTER.... BUT TRYING TO SUE THE STATE IS PRETTY MUCH IMPOSSIBLE."**
>
> *– JACKIE Y., INCARCERATED DURING THE PANDEMIC IN HAGERSTOWN*

A photograph of a peanut butter sandwich and hamburger served to people incarcerated in Texas prisons during COVID-19 (The Marshall Project, 2020)

Became Even Worse During Covid-19.'[220]

John, who was incarcerated in a Maryland jail during the pandemic, described "willingly" going to solitary confinement in order to avoid folks who may have Covid. He told us: "The state went on emergency lockdown. We were locked in for 23 hours a day. Sometimes you didn't even get the one hour out… It was just like being in a maximum security prison." John continued: "Thank God I never [caught Covid]. But at the same time, when my housing unit started getting it, I got myself in a little bit of trouble on purpose, so I could go to a single-man cell.

In February 2021, incarcerated folks at Chesapeake Detention Facility—a state-run jail in Baltimore City that confines "federal pretrial detainees"—filed a class-action lawsuit against the facility's warden and the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. As the Baltimore Sun reported, the lawsuit alleged that "corrections officials have mishandled an outbreak of the coronavirus… leading to one-third of its inmates and staff members contracting the virus in less than one month."[221] The lawsuit further described how the facility, "which is best described as a broken-down, pest-plagued warehouse, would be an inhumane detention space for healthy inmates. For individuals who have already tested positive for a potentially deadly virus, it is nothing short of horrifying."[222] Folks we spoke with who were currently and formerly imprisoned during the pandemic described similar experiences in institutions all across the state.

Because I was a little afraid of people coming in... I didn't want that to be my last memory of life, man. People were dying from that shit. I didn't want that to be my last memory. I got six kids out here. I just didn't want to take the chance. I made myself miserable to save my life."

Conclusion and Part 5

While food conditions in all Maryland correctional facilities are horrendous, Part 4 of this report has brought to light the singularly dehumanizing experience of eating in a Baltimore prison. Part 4 has also shown how the misleading logic of reform falls apart upon closer examination—instead of improving over time, correctional food service has in reality gotten more deadly.

In the next part of this report, we dive deeper into prisons' use of food as an overt form of control, violence, and punishment.

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