



The APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism
C/O Christina Rees MP office
House of Commons
London
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Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP
Minister for Women and Equalities
Government Equalities Office
Sanctuary Buildings
16-20 Great Smith Street
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5 December 2018

Dear Ms Mordaunt

We are writing on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Vegetarianism and Veganism.

In our October meeting, we discussed public procurement and the provision of vegan food in the public sector. We heard that the number of people choosing a plant-based diet is rapidly increasing in the UK.

Ipsos Mori polls have shown that the number of vegans in the UK stands at 600,000. The figure is understood to be doubling every two years.

With that in mind, as I am sure you are aware, the growing number of vegans need to be able to have choice and options in public sector settings such as schools, hospitals and state-run care homes.

So we want to ensure that all people who choose to eat a vegan diet have this right respected by ensuring access to sufficient nutrition while in those public sector settings.

At the meeting was vegan campaigner, and mum Laura Chepner. Laura recently hit the headlines locally¹ and nationally for successfully campaigning for her five-year-old daughter to be offered a vegan option at school.

Laura was disappointed that on her daughter's first day at school in Bury, Greater Manchester, there wasn't a vegan school dinner because being vegan was deemed by the school as just a 'lifestyle choice'. However, after pairing up with her local MP she

¹ Dobson, C. (2018). 'Mum wins battle to get vegan free school meals for her daughter'. Manchester Evening News. Available at: <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/vegan-free-school-meals-bury-15254775>

found that veganism as a belief is supported by the Human Rights Act 2010. The school took this on board and now offers a vegan option at lunchtimes, ensuring that the legal protections provided are available in practice.

This was a successful campaign but there are many others still trying to create equal rights for vegans, which would reflect the protections afforded to vegans in law.

One woman who had just given birth and suffering from anaemia was offered only potatoes and toast just hours after delivery.

The new mum, who chose to remain anonymous, contacted The Vegan Society with her account in the hope of trying to prompt change.

She told staff: “After delivering a baby, the only food available to me was potatoes, salad and toast. This was very difficult as I had anaemia following childbirth, and needed to discharge myself to get a healthy balanced meal at home.”

This is sadly one of many incidents where sufficient nutrition is just not available to people who crucially need it, demonstrating that to ensure vegans are treated equally we need to provide genuine vegan options with sufficient nutritional value.

We are in no doubt you will appreciate that we must protect people’s right to follow protected beliefs where these are not harming others. Veganism comes within the scope of UK equality law, and is often born of deep moral convictions.

The Vegan Society and Pro Veg are backing a legal change to ensure that every public-sector institution provides at least one vegan option. There are significant public health and environmental benefits to increased uptake of vegan diets, and crucially this would ensure that the rights afforded to vegans under the 2010 Act are protected in practice.

We heard from Vegetarian for Life, whose representative discussed the problems facing older people in care homes who lose capacity and the ability to ask for food that fits their values. As with other contexts, provision is very variable here.

It is entirely achievable to change the law so that public-sector institutions offer at least one vegan meal.

Nuno M. Alvim, president of the Portuguese Vegetarian Association which successfully campaigned to change the law in Portugal, was also at the meeting. In Portugal, a vegan meal is now provided by every public-sector institution as standard. Portuguese dietitians concluded that plant-based options would be substantially cheaper. And we believe that a similar policy in the UK could be a cost-saving measure, after the change has taken place.

In your capacity as Minister for Equalities, we ask that you would:

- Look into a legislative change that would guarantee a plant-based meal in every public-sector institution
- Launch a review into public-sector provision of plant-based food, to establish the scale of the problems facing individuals concerned.

We very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Christina Rees MP, Chair of the APPG