

# NEWS

FROM THE OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER  
**PAUL KORETZ**  
FIFTH DISTRICT



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KORETZ CONTACT: [Alison.Simard@lacity.org](mailto:Alison.Simard@lacity.org), 213-473-7005  
NAZARIAN CONTACT: [Brian.Stedge@asm.ca.gov](mailto:Brian.Stedge@asm.ca.gov), (818) 376-4246

## Landmark California Legislation Encourages Climate-friendly, Plant-Based Lunch Options for Students

*State Bill would help California's schools cut their greenhouse gases by  
serving healthier food.*

February 13, 2019, LOS ANGELES, CA - Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian (D-Van Nuys) introduced landmark legislation incentivizing K-12 public schools across the state to offer healthier, climate-friendly lunch options. Under AB 479, the Healthy Climate-Friendly School Lunch Act, schools would receive additional state funding for serving a plant-based entrée and plant-based milk. The bill is co-sponsored by Animal Hope in Legislation, Friends of the Earth, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, and Social Compassion in Legislation.

AB 479 also includes critical state support for staff training, student engagement, recipe development, and other technical assistance needed to help public schools boost participation rates and successfully serve plant-based foods.

“AB 479 will increase access to healthy food options for low-income communities and reduce our carbon footprint at the same time,” stated Assemblymember Nazarian.

“Given the effects that we and our northern neighbors are still feeling from the climate-exacerbated Woolsey and Camp Fires, there is no question that we are in a time of profound environmental crisis,” stated Los Angeles Councilmember Paul Koretz who hosted the press conference today at LA’s City Hall. “The Healthy Climate-Friendly School Lunch Act makes the best use of our institutional purchasing power to provide both healthy food and a gateway to a safe climate for the very children whose future and whose palates it will be serving.”

Growing evidence, highlighted in the recent [EAT-Lancet Commission’s comprehensive study](#), shows that a plant-based diet is more sustainable and environmentally friendly. According to research from [Tufts University](#), shifting to more plant-based options can reduce our carbon footprint by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and requires less land and water for food production.

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Councilmember Paul Koretz  
200 North Spring Street, Room 440  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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“California won’t meet its ambitious climate goals unless it tackles consumption-based emissions from the food sector. With millions of pounds of animal foods served each year, this bill will help California’s public schools reduce their carbon footprint while serving kids healthier food,” said Kari Hamerschlag, Deputy Director of Food and Agriculture at Friends of the Earth. “If every public school swapped out a beef burger for a veggie burger just once a month, it would save 300 million pounds of CO2 a year.”

California has set a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. Empowering schools to contribute to this effort is an important step for California’s climate strategy. [Research](#) shows that healthy, protein rich plant-based foods like lentils and beans are 26 to 34 times less carbon intensive than beef.

“There are so many reasons to pursue a plant-based diet, with an increasing number of studies showing both the health benefits and the environmental impact of abstaining from meat, dairy, and eggs,” said Judie Mancuso, Founder and CEO of Social Compassion in Legislation. “This bill is about providing a choice to young people who have decided that eating animals is the wrong choice for them – and for our planet.”

“As the world moves forward and progressively changes, the way we teach our youth will impact not only the climate, but our ethics, our morals, and the future that comes before us. This program is about choices. Choosing not just for ourselves, but the environment, and our children,” added Marc Ching, Founder and CEO of Animal Hope in Legislation.

The bill does not mandate a plant-based diet in schools but incentivizes schools to offer plant-based options. While numerous school districts across the state want to increase plant-based offerings, many face cost barriers since animal-based foods and cow’s milk are heavily subsidized by the federal government relative to plant-based options.

"More and more people my age understand that if you love animals, you don't eat them. But it can be hard to find something to eat, especially at school," said Genesis Butler, who, at age 10, became one of the youngest people ever to give a TED Talk. "I'm glad California is looking at giving us more options to help animals and the earth."

This measure also recognizes that California’s increasingly diverse population deserves greater attention. “Our state is a global microcosm with many different cultural needs,” noted Assemblymember Nazarian. “California’s school meal policy should not only reflect this diversity, but also incorporate the extensive research on the health benefits of plant-based nutrition.”

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According to the [Journal of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#), a plant-based diet has substantial health benefits. It can reduce the risk of diabetes, help manage weight, and provide protection against cancer and other diseases.

“Bringing plant-based meals to schools will help students establish healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime,” said Neal Barnard, M.D., president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. “Not only do these foods help students stay focused and energized in the classroom today, but they also reduce long-term risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and other chronic diseases.”

Under AB 479, eligible entrées must be free of animal products or byproducts, including meat, poultry, fish, dairy, or eggs to qualify for additional reimbursement. Schools are eligible to apply for reimbursement if they serve an increase in plant-based options from a baseline year.

Many school districts across the state, including Novato, San Francisco, Oakland, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, Capistrano, and others are reducing the carbon footprint of their food by serving delicious, healthier plant-based entrees. AB 479 will provide critical technical and financial support to expand these menu offerings and encourage many other schools to follow suit.

*Adrin Nazarian represents the 46th Assembly District, serving the San Fernando Valley communities of Hollywood Hills, Lake Balboa, North Hills, North Hollywood, Panorama City, Sherman Oaks, Studio City, Toluca Lake, Valley Glen, Universal City, Van Nuys, and Valley Village*

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