

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Vegan Inclusion Act (VIA)

Prepared for the Office of the Senator - State of California

April 2026

1. Executive Summary

The Vegan Inclusion Act (VIA) establishes a clear and enforceable standard requiring food-service establishments in California to provide accessible, clearly identified **100% plant-based food options**.

This Act ensures that individuals who follow plant-based diets - whether for ethical, religious, health, or cultural reasons - have equitable access to dining options in all business establishments. It aligns with California's commitments to civil rights, public health, and environmental sustainability.

The VIA seeks to:

- Promote **equal access and non-discrimination** in food service
 - Guarantee the availability of **clearly labeled 100% plant-based options**
 - Support individuals whose dietary choices are based on **creed, religion, or ethical conviction**
 - Reinforce enforcement of the **Unruh Civil Rights Act**
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2. Purpose and Legislative Intent

The purpose of the VIA is to address a gap in California's regulatory framework by ensuring that all Californians - regardless of dietary practice - can participate equally in public dining.

Legislative Intent

1. Equal Access and Anti-Discrimination

Individuals who follow plant-based diets due to religion, ethical beliefs, or personal creed are entitled to equal access to services in public accommodations. Denial of meaningful food options may constitute unequal treatment under California law.

2. Clarity and Consumer Transparency

Menu labeling must be clear and easily understood by all consumers. Terms such as "vegan" or a "V" symbol may not be universally recognized. Therefore, standardized plain-language labeling is necessary.

3. Public Health and Sustainability

Expanding access to plant-based foods supports public health goals and environmental sustainability through increased availability of plant-forward meal options.

3. Key Provisions

3.1 Mandatory Plant-Based Food Availability

- All covered food-service establishments shall offer **at least one (1) substantive 100% plant-based food option** at all times during business operations.
 - The plant-based option must be:
 - **A complete meal offering**, not limited to side dishes or minor modifications
 - Comparable in **portion size and nutritional value** to other menu items
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3.2 Standardized Labeling Requirement

- All qualifying items must be clearly labeled using the exact phrase: **“100% Plant-Based”**
 - The use of symbols (e.g., “V”) or terminology such as “vegan” **alone is not sufficient** to meet compliance.
 - Labeling must be:
 - Clearly visible on **printed menus, digital menus, and menu boards**
 - Written in plain language that is **easily understood by the general public**
 - Staff must be able to identify and confirm which items meet the **“100% Plant-Based”** standard upon request.
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3.3 Elimination of Separate Menu Requirement

- Food-service establishments are **not required to provide a separate vegan or plant-based menu**.
 - Instead, compliance is achieved through **integration and clear labeling** of plant-based options within the standard menu.
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3.4 Enforcement of the Unruh Civil Rights Act

The VIA explicitly affirms the application of the **Unruh Civil Rights Act**, which prohibits discrimination in all business establishments.

- Individuals who follow a plant-based diet as part of their **religion, ethical belief system, or personal creed** are entitled to equal access to services.
 - Denying reasonable access to appropriate food options may constitute **discriminatory practice** where such dietary adherence is tied to protected beliefs.
 - This Act reinforces that **all customers must be able to fully participate in public dining without exclusion or disadvantage**.
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3.5 Covered Establishments

This Act applies to all food-service establishments holding a valid food facility permit in California, including:

- Restaurants, cafés, and cafeterias
 - Fast-food establishments and food courts
 - Catering operations
 - Institutional dining facilities (e.g., hospitals, universities, correctional facilities, government buildings)
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3.6 Exemptions

Exemptions include:

- Temporary food facilities
 - Mobile food vendors with fewer than two (2) menu items
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3.7 Enforcement and Penalties

- Enforcement shall be conducted by **county environmental health departments** during routine inspections.
 - Violations will be addressed as follows:
 - **First violation:** Written notice with a 60-day compliance period
 - **Subsequent violations:** Civil penalties not exceeding \$1,000 per violation per inspection cycle
 - No criminal penalties apply under this Act
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4. Broader Impact

Civil Rights Alignment

This Act strengthens enforcement of existing civil rights protections by ensuring that dietary practices tied to religion or ethical belief are respected in public accommodations.

Consumer Clarity

By mandating the use of “**100% Plant-Based**”, the Act removes ambiguity and ensures accessibility across all literacy and cultural backgrounds.

Economic and Operational Feasibility

- Implementation integrates into existing inspection systems
- No new agency or regulatory body is required
- Establishments may benefit from expanding customer access

5. Conclusion

The revised Vegan Inclusion Act prioritizes **access, clarity, and civil rights enforcement**.

By requiring clearly labeled **100% plant-based options** - rather than a separate menu - the Act provides a practical, scalable framework that ensures inclusivity while minimizing operational burden on businesses.

This legislation affirms a fundamental principle:

All Californians deserve equal access to food choices in public spaces, without discrimination.

6. Conclusion and Call to Action

The Vegan Inclusion Act represents a measured, practical step toward a more inclusive and sustainable food-service landscape in California. By requiring a single plant-based entrée option and a dedicated vegan menu that respects the values and dignity of plant-based diners, the VIA imposes a minimal compliance burden while delivering meaningful benefits to public health, consumer choice, environmental sustainability, and economic opportunity.

We respectfully urge the Senator's office to consider sponsoring or co-sponsoring this legislation in the upcoming session.

This briefing was prepared for informational and advocacy purposes.