June 1, 2023

Honourable Karina Gould
Ministry of Families, Children and Social Development
Email: karina.gould@parl.gc.ca

Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food
Email: Marie-Claude.Bibeau@parl.gc.ca

Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos
Ministry of Health
Email: jean-yves.duclos@parl.gc.ca

Dear Federal Ministers Gould, Bibeau and Duclos:

Re: Federal School Food Policy

I write on behalf of the Huron Perth Public Health Board of Health. As the federal government prepares to release a National School Food Policy and invest in programs across the county, we wish to reiterate the call for the development of a universal, cost-shared school food program for Canada and share our concerns about the current state of student nutrition programs in Ontario and our region.

Currently across Ontario, many school programs are unable to meet current demands, shutting down before the end of the school year or having to limit the foods served in order to get through the to the end of the year due to insufficient funds. Many programs have felt the strain with limited increases to provincial funding since 2014, while the rising food costs of the last two years and increased demand have significantly out-paced current funding. Other schools who have not previously had a program are seeing a demand, but there are no funds for new programs. There are urgent and immediate needs now. Children and youth need access to nourishing food to thrive and, without further investment, many will not have access to nourishing food at school. The current state of school food programs across Canada is patchwork and resource-limited. While many schools in Ontario do have student nutrition programs partially funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, a significant investment from the federal government would allow for expansion of services and to address existing gaps. The current reliance on fundraising, volunteers, and donations is inconsistent, unsustainable, and puts schools who most need the support at a significant disadvantage. School food programs offer many academic and nutritional benefits and should be implemented along with additional income supports to reduce health inequities and food insecurity for families across Canada. School food policy and programs alone cannot alleviate poverty and food insecurity.¹,²

intake, supporting healthy growth and development, supporting academic success, attendance and educational attainment, and improving mental health and well-being.\textsuperscript{3}

Currently many elementary schools do not have adequate facilities to allow safe food handling and production of onsite food for meal/snack programs or for hands-on food literacy learning opportunities for students. Adequate funding for infrastructure improvements would benefit school food programs and academic learning across health and physical education, science and technology and other cross-curricular learning opportunities, which can build critical food skills for students when transitioning into adulthood.

School food programs should be designed to\textsuperscript{4}:
\begin{itemize}
  \item serve tasty, nourishing, culturally appropriate foods
  \item ensure that ALL students in a school can access the program in a non-stigmatizing manner
  \item be a cost-shared model, including federal support
  \item be flexible and locally adapted to the context of the school and region, including commitment to Indigenous control over programs for Indigenous students
  \item support Canadian farmers and local food producers
  \item promote food literacy
\end{itemize}

Huron Perth Public Health Board of Health stands alongside other Boards of Health, School Boards, Municipalities, and other government agencies and organizations in supporting the Coalition for Healthy School Food’s vision that every school-aged child and youth has a nutritious meal or snack at school daily.

We urge the federal Ministries of Families, Children and Social Development and Agriculture and Agri-Food to continue your work towards a comprehensive, cost-shared, universally accessible National School Food Policy and national school nutritious meal program with provinces, territories, municipalities, Indigenous partners and stakeholders.\textsuperscript{5} Every investment in children and youth counts.

Sincerely,

Bernie MacLellan, Board Chair
Huron Perth Public Health

BM/ikl


cc. Honourable Michael Parsa, Minister of Children Community and Social Services; michael.parsaco@pc.ola.org
Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education; minister.edu@ontario.ca
Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health; sylvia.jones@ontario.ca
John Nater, MP Perth-Wellington; john.nater@parl.gc.ca
Ben Lobb, MP Huron-Bruce; ben.lobb@parl.gc.ca
Matthew Rae, MPP Perth-Wellington; matthew.rae@pc.ola.org
Honourable Thompson, MPP Huron-Bruce; lisa.thompson@pc.ola.org
Ontario Boards of Health (allhealthunits@lists.alphaweb.org)
alPHa (info@alphaweb.org)