

TDC 2024.01 National School Food Program

1 **Resolved**, that the Toronto Diocesan Council of The Catholic Women’s League of Canada
2 in its 103rd Annual Convention assembled, request that the Ontario Provincial Council of
3 The Catholic Women’s League of Canada urge the federal government to develop a
4 National School Food Program that will improve the health and education of children, and
5 be it further,

6 **Resolved**, that this resolution be forwarded through the Ontario Provincial Council of The
7 Catholic Women’s League of Canada for consideration at its 77th Annual Convention in
8 July 2024 to the National Council of The Catholic Women’s League of Canada for
9 consideration at its 104th Annual Convention in August 2024.

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14 Gifted by St. John Fisher Council, Peel Region

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Brief

Canada is ranked 37th out of 41 wealthy countries in food security and nutrition, and it is the only G7 country without a national school food program (UNICEF Canada, 2019; 1). Meals eaten at school are one of the important indicators for improved health and education of children. School food programs have shown to encourage healthy eating behaviours and food/body relationships as well as the development of lifelong nutrition. (Zhong, et.al.; 2023; 421).

Food insecurity is a growing concern. “In 2022, 18.4% of people in the ten provinces lived in a food-insecure household. That amounts to 6.9 million people, including almost 1.8 million children, living in households that struggled to afford the food they need.” (Proof, 2023; 1).

The diets consumed by Canadian children are poor due to insufficient intake of healthy food such as fruits, vegetables, milk, or milk products with higher consumption of foods high in fats, sugar, fast foods and skipping meals. Consumption of high-fat, high-sugar, and fast foods, with frequently skipped meals have contributed to diet-related diseases among children in Canada which may make youths today the first generation to develop poorer health outcomes and shorter lives than their parents (Haines & Ruetz, 2020; 3).

A national school food program helps reduce diet-related chronic diseases and contributes to children’s physical development and mental health well being. Other benefits could include increased attendance, decreased tardiness and dropout rates that would improve the overall academic outcome. A successful national school food program would also reduce food insecurity, offer family support; foster food skills; address food sustainability and social stigma by supporting local foods systems and economic development (Haines & Ruetz, 2020; 3, 4).

Most elementary and secondary schools in Canada do not have food infrastructures such as kitchens and gardens. Most teachers are not trained to lead cooking and gardening lessons (Ruetz & McKenna, 2021; 94). School food programs in Canada are under-resourced and rely on a patchwork of funders, including governments, and non-profit and for-profit organizations which mainly rely on volunteers. (Ruetz, & Martin, 2022; 2)

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a network comprised of over 260 non-profit member organizations. The coalition is seeking public investment and Canada-wide standards for a cost-shared school food program that would see all children having daily access to healthy food at school. (Food Secure Canada; 1, 2)

The Government of Canada’s “National School Food Policy Engagements, What We Heard Report”, showed an overwhelming support for a National School Food Policy. In fact, 96% of Canadians who participated in the online Questionnaire agreed that school food programs benefit children. Stakeholder organizations supported the Government developing a School Food Policy and funding the programs. (Government of Canada 2023; 8).

Bill C-322, a Private Members’s Bill - “An Act to develop a national framework to establish a national food program” received its second reading on December 6, 2023. The petition has been referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Beyond serving as a social safety net, a national school food program is more than just about food; it offers opportunities to promote health equity, nutrition literacy and lifelong healthy eating habits. (Zhong, et.al., 2023; 423).

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Action Plan

1. Council and Individuals Members:
 - Volunteer in school food programs
 - Donate money to school food programs.
2. Promote annual Nutrition Month sponsored by Dietitians of Canada and other partners,
3. Write letters to the Ontario Ministers of Provincial Parliament (Minister of Health and Long Term Care), Federal Members of Parliament (Minister of Health, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development) to establish a national school food program.
4. Monitor Bill C-322, An Act to develop a national framework to establish a school food program (National Framework for a School Food Program Act).
5. Monitor all levels of governments' responses to the resolution.