

Sent by e-mail to: [chrystia.freeland@fin.gc.ca](mailto:chrystia.freeland@fin.gc.ca)

March 18, 2024

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland  
Minister of Finance & Deputy Prime Minister  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Freeland:

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is increasingly hearing from our member municipalities that food security issues are impacting more people and communities across the province. AMO supports the request from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) that the federal government include a commitment to \$1 billion over five years, with a minimum of \$200 million per year for a National School Food Program in Budget 2024.

Universal free school meals can help families immediately by taking pressure off household budgets, improving children's long term physical and mental health, and improving student performance. Evidence from comparable high-income countries has been shown to provide societal returns in health, education, social protection, and agriculture. It would also complement Canada's universal childcare and the Canada Child Benefit to bring immediate relief to families while also contributing to long-term economic, health, and social benefits.

As the level of government closest to the people, municipalities respond to increasing social pressures by delivering programs and services to support their residents at all ages and stages of life. The critical services municipalities provide drive inclusive growth and build the vibrant communities that make Ontario a great place to live, work, and invest. However, we cannot do this alone. Federal investment in a National School Food Program will support families and communities and will have long-term positive impacts on social prosperity and economic participation. By investing in the health of children today we are investing in the next generation of our communities and future talent for our workforces.

We strongly believe that the federal government should fulfill their election platform commitment to a National School Food Program. We support collaboration between the federal government and the provinces and territories to work towards a successful cost-shared program. We look forward to the inclusion of a National School Food Program in Budget 2024.

Sincerely,



Colin Best  
AMO President  
Councillor, Region of Halton

cc: The Honourable Jenna Sudds, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development  
Cathy Abraham, President, Ontario Public School Boards' Association