



October 2, 2021

Elizabeth May (MP, Saanich—Gulf Islands), Leader of the Green Party's Parliamentary Caucus

Sent by email to: Elizabeth.May@parl.gc.ca

Dear MP Elizabeth May,

On behalf of the Coalition for Healthy School Food and its [170+ organizational members](#), we are writing to ask for the Green Party support, in and outside of Parliament, for a School Food Program for Canada.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food, Canada's recognized voice for school nutrition and a growing network of health, education, Indigenous and environmental organizations, is seeking federal investment in a cost-shared school food program that would see all children having daily access to healthy food at school. Our members in every province and territory advocate for funding and support from their own provincial and territorial jurisdictions. The Coalition is hosted by Food Secure Canada.

Today we are writing today to request a meeting with you to discuss the importance of school food to the health and well-being of all children and youth in Canada. We hope that the Green Party, both in and outside of Parliament, **will work with the Liberals to advance this issue**. Given that this issue has **support from across political parties, we believe that it is one that the government could immediately advance**. All provinces and territories and a growing number of cities already invest in school food. Our Coalition is working with these governments to build their interest in partnering with the Government of Canada to welcome federal standards and funding.

We sent [this](#) letter to PM Trudeau this week and asked that his government include the development of a Universal, Healthy School Food Program for Canada in the mandate letters of the next Minister of Health, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, (responsible for the development of social programs such as childcare), and Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (responsible for the Food Policy for Canada).

In these mandate letters, we recommend including the term "healthy", aligning with the 2019 Canada's Food Guide, to keep the program focused on improving the physical and mental health of future generations. **We believe that it is also essential to anchor the principle of "universal"**, meaning that all children in a school where a program is offered would have access to that program, and that eventually, every student in Canada would have a healthy meal at school each day. Canadian research has confirmed that targeted programs with means-testing can produce stigma, decrease participation rates and create expensive bureaucratic systems to monitor. A School Food Program for Canada that is universal and without means-testing can help level the playing field and ensure that all students are able to access a healthy meal or snack each day. It would, however, not be a replacement for needed income supports for the unacceptable number of Canadians living in poverty.

A federal investment should also aim to enable students to develop the skills and literacy needed for a lifetime of healthy eating, help students be ready to learn at school and support environmentally sustainable procurement to address the climate emergency as we highlight in our [Submission in advance of the 2020 budget](#). A School Food Program for Canada would have a positive impact on all families, particularly women who invest a significant amount of time preparing food for school. Investing in school food would enable the government to advance multiple government commitments, including the [Food Policy for Canada](#), the [Healthy Eating Strategy](#), and advancing Canada's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) commitments.

In our [2022 budget](#) submission, we recommend a \$2.7 billion annual investment in a School Food Program for Canada to fill the gaps in programming that already exists on the ground. We calculated this based on: 5,575,691 students (Stats Canada) x 190 school days at an average of \$5.00 per school meal (including the cost of food, labour, equipment and northern food allowance) = \$5.4 billion annual cost. This is similar to Finnish school food program costing calculated by Ruetz & McKenna, (2021). We will be happy to share this calculation with key government staff as they develop the federal program.

Through stakeholder consultations, we have developed [8 Principles](#) to guide the development of a School Food Program for Canada that we recommend to the government. These include federal nutritional standards, conflict of interest safeguards that prevent programs from marketing unhealthy food and specific products, a framework for consistent Canada-wide program evaluation, and that programs be locally-led and controlled. These principles also stress the importance that the government consult with Indigenous Nations and leaders and **provide separate additional funding to Indigenous Nations and communities** to advance Indigenous-led school food initiatives.

Our Coalition includes members from across the not-for-profit sector including community-based school food program implementation partners from all provinces and territories, Indigenous leaders, as well as many of Canada's most recognized national health, education and philanthropic organizations. We represent a broad and deep network within civil society that can credibly and capably mobilize community support, help to design and refine successful models of school food delivery and lend direct support to the delivery of future programs. We are ready to work with the government and all other government jurisdictions in Canada to help develop the best possible School Food Program for Canada. **Please let us know if we can provide any additional information:** schoolfood@foodsecurecanada.org or 416 537-6856.

Sincerely,



Debbie Field, Coordinator, Coalition for Healthy School Food

cc.: Gisèle Yasmeen, Executive Director, Food Secure Canada, 176 member organizations of the Coalition for Healthy School Food, PM Trudeau.