

TITLE: Support for advocacy on Private Member's Bill C-322 – *National Framework for a School Food Program Act*

TO: Board of Health

FROM: Kimberly Leadbeater, Public Health Dietitian – School Health Team

DATE: March 21, 2024

APPROVED BY: Dr. Natalie Bocking, Medical Officer of Health & CEO

In Camera?  Yes  No

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## Overview

The Ontario Public Health Standards mandate public health units to partner and collaborate with school boards and schools to achieve optimal health of school-aged children and youth. In accordance with the School Health Guideline 2018, assisting with the promotion of healthy eating behaviors is a key requirement.

## Recommendations to Board

THAT the Board of Health send correspondence to MP Philip Lawrence in support of [MP Serge Cormier's Private Member's Bill C-322, National Framework for a School Food Program Act](#).

THAT the Board of Health request MP Philip Lawrence work with caucus colleagues to seek unanimous consent of Bill C-322 in support of children and youth across Canada.

## Issue

Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs) promote a healthy school food environment. They provide children and youth universal access to nourishing food to promote healthy growth and development and to support their academic achievements. The cost to run these programs is significant with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services providing only seed funding to SNPs. There has not been a substantial annual increase to core Ontario SNP funding since 2014. Many programs have felt the strain for years; however, the [rising food costs of the last two years](#) and increased demand have significantly out-paced funding. Additionally, schools within priority population

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neighborhoods often have increased financial barriers to support their SNPs and tend to have challenges with recruiting and retaining volunteers.

## Background

All schools within the HKPRDHU region have SNPs. For local SNPs to be successful, they require significant support from the Health Unit lead/community partnerships. During the 2022-23 school year, the following number of meals were served within local schools:

- Northumberland: 957,304
- City of Kawartha Lakes: 723,507 and
- Haliburton: 236,448

To help sustain the operation of these SNPs, during the 2022-23 school year, Northumberland Food for Thought provided \$52,309.30 to subsidize SNP food costs and \$2,908.28 to support equipment purchases. In the City of Kawartha Lakes, Food for Kids provided \$5,876 to assist with bulk purchases of local foods for SNPs and \$7867.24 to support equipment purchases.

Community partnerships such as Northumberland Food for Thought and Food for Kids – City of Kawartha Lakes have noticed decreased financial support over the years and this trend is expected to continue with the current economy. While community members and businesses recognize the need, they do not have the same capacity to sustain annual donations.

## Analysis

Locally, school staff, SNP coordinators and community partnerships are becoming increasingly concerned that SNPs either decrease their days of operation or close prior to the end of the school year because of lack of funds. Sustainable and adequate government funding for student nutrition is urgently required to continue to provide adequate nourishing food through the remaining school year.

## Conclusions

Canada is currently the only country in the G7 that does not have a national school food program or national SNP standards. Advocacy to government calling for a national school food policy and program would help ensure that all children have the nourishment they need to learn and grow and improve their health and well-being. A national school food policy could also contribute to the development of a more sustainable food system by supporting local food production and local

economies through the creation of jobs. A letter from the Board of Health to MP Philip Lawrence in support of Private Member's Bill C-322 – *National Framework for a School Food Program Act* would be an important proactive step to encourage caucus to seek unanimous consent of this Bill for the betterment of children and youth across Canada. To build on this advocacy, a similar letter could also be sent from each municipal council within the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit region demonstrating "it takes a village to raise a child".