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May 31, 2017

Minister Chris Ballard
Poverty Reduction Strategy Office
Ferguson Block 6th Floor
77 Wellesley St. W
Toronto, ON M7A 2T5

PRSO@Ontario.ca

Dear Minister Ballard,

The Nourish Project and the Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN) together would like to congratulate the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office for launching Ontario's First Food Security Strategy. We appreciated the opportunity to meet with you in Peterborough on May 23, 2017 to share our experiences and examples of our work supporting community food security.

The Nourish Project uses a collaborative approach to grow access to healthy, locally-produced food, food literacy, and food advocacy. Through innovative programs and strong partnerships, we create spaces where people feel that they belong. Our goal is to develop a dynamic local network of places for food dedicated to community, health and fairness.

Nourish grew out of the Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN). PFAN includes a broad sector of food and agricultural organizations engaged in addressing and building community food security as part of local poverty reduction efforts. PFAN brings together representatives from health, education, agriculture, social agencies and people with lived experiences in both the City and County of Peterborough.

PFAN supports networking and communication to consider food access, food security and focus on improvements to programs and processes that will result in increased access to healthy, affordable and local food. Members are also particularly interested in the potential of government-level responses and building the case for new approaches to food systems planning that includes a focus on food security.

On May 17, 2017, Nourish and PFAN hosted a Community Dinner and Discussion about the Ontario Food Security Strategy. Over 30 people attended to share their thoughts and ideas on the development of the Strategy and to share their experiences. Facilitated discussions were led by Nourish Peer Advocates.

Nourish Peer Advocates have taken part in a training program that provides leadership opportunities for people experiencing poverty and marginalization.

A full transcript of responses from our Community Dinner and Discussion is attached (Appendix A). For summary purposes, here are key themes and comments that are critical to be considered in the development and implementation of a provincial Food Security Strategy.

Theme 1: Empowered communities with custom-made solutions.

Context: Food insecurity rates have risen in Peterborough to the highest among Ontario health units. This community has committed to food programs and activities for over 25 years to support people but it is still not enough. Although programs can impact food literacy, healthy eating and social inclusion, they are not able to effectively address income which is the root cause of poverty.

Local Discussion: Peterborough has many programs and opportunities to support people who are food insecure. Despite these programs, issues including a high percentage of seniors and students, high unemployment rates and low incomes impact people's ability to be food secure. It is important to have more research conducted on the costs of food insecurity locally and to implement policies that increase income (i.e., living wages), support for caregivers and secure, truly affordable housing for everyone in our community.

Theme 2: Integrated food initiatives that use knowledge to drive collective impact.

Context: The Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN) is one example of a group where people work together to build community food security. PFAN frames its work according to the food security continuum and uses specific targets to drive collective impact. The food security continuum makes it clear that focusing our resources and attention on emergency needs, a dominant strategy for the past 30 years, is not the answer. Meaningful and sustainable change requires collective action and a strong commitment to addressing the root causes of food insecurity (i.e. income).

Local Discussion: Peterborough is home to many innovative food initiatives and networks supporting food literacy, food security and geared for those living on limited incomes. Working together and collaboration is key to success. Participants noted that people in rural communities have unique challenges. It was also noted that programs are important but sustainability is a concern. Participants look to Basic Income as a viable response to food security and poverty.

Theme 3: Food Security is about more than food.

Context: We know that food insecurity is caused by inadequate income. For the past 30 years, there has been a belief that food banks have been one key answer to food insecurity. However, research shows that food banks are unable to address food security or even food insecurity because of limited supply and too much demand.

Participants acknowledge that no "one size fits all" approach will work for everyone in our community. Adequate income is critical and must be addressed as part of a food security strategy along with housing

affordability and supply, cost of utilities, healthcare supports and educational opportunities. Collaboration between all levels of government is critical to eliminate food insecurity and improve lives.

Theme 4: Driving Innovation.

Peterborough has been innovative for over 25 years in developing partnerships and programs to support people around food in our community. Yet household food insecurity rates in Peterborough are among the highest in Ontario. It is critical that people's well-being comes first and that the economy focusses on well-being at the household level. As Dr. Valerie Tarasuk's healthcare cost research has shown, poverty is expensive and costs our community dearly.

Peterborough is home to many innovative programs supported by not-for-profits, community organizations, volunteers, the municipal government and the provincial government. Participants felt strongly that government support is important for these programs to continue and best support people. Projects that integrate access to healthy food, affordable living, employment, education, and health need to be considered.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this response on behalf of those who attended our local event. We look forward to being further engaged in the development of Ontario's First Food Security Strategy and determining how best to impact food security and the high rates of food insecurity in Peterborough City and County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn Doris RD". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Carolyn Doris RD

Nourish Chair and Peterborough Food Action Network Member

Enclosure