Dear Mr. MacMaster,

In advance of the 2024 budget, please accept this submission from the Nova Scotia Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF). The CHSF is comprised of more than 400 non-profit organizations across Canada, including prominent organizations in Nova Scotia like Community Health Boards, the IWK Health Centre, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.

The Nova Scotia Chapter of the CHSF brings together stakeholders from regions and sectors across Nova Scotia to engage in dialogue, share resources, and collaborate on collective advocacy towards the development of a cost-shared pan-Canadian school food program that meets the diverse needs of Nova Scotia school communities based on the Coalition’s guiding principles. Nourish Nova Scotia hosts and coordinates the activities of the NS-CHSF.

Our pre-budget submission from last year is appended, as Nova Scotia still has not invested in human resources, infrastructure and consultation which are essential for an effective response to the September 2022 Auditor General’s report on Healthy Eating in Schools. Also appended here is a Frequently Asked Questions document focused on federal investment in school food that has many relevant points for our province to consider.

This year, we would like to highlight our reservations concerning the practice of using “equity meals” to address perceived hunger amongst students. Years of research on school food programs worldwide make it quite clear that universal school food programs create welcoming, inclusive environments where children who are disproportionately food insecure will seek nourishment. This evidence-based practice suggests high participation rates are required to ensure that hungry students access nutrition at school.

Equity meals – where children either self–select or are selected by support workers, educators or administrators as needing food– are not supported by any research we are aware of. Indeed, research conducted in South Shore Regional Centre of Education (SSRCE) by Amberley Ruetz, Postdoctoral Fellow & Co-Chair of CAFS' School Food Working Group found that there was no consistent practice in either the identification of eligible students or in the mode of delivering equity meals in cafeterias. While SSRCE is acknowledged as the leading region in terms of school food delivery in NS, the provision of equity meals is not a leading practice. Instead, what is needed is a commitment by both provincial and federal governments to fund robust school food programs where equity meals would not be needed.

This past year, we’ve seen historic school food investments from other provinces such as British Columbia, Manitoba and Newfoundland. We sincerely hope that Nova Scotia will follow suit.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Corbin

Coordinator, NS Coalition for Healthy School Food