



Joe Cressy 周凱捷

City Councillor | Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York

March 23, 2022

Economic and Community Development Committee

Dear Chair and Members,

Re: Updating Toronto's Food Charter for All

In 1976, Canada signed the United Nations Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights, including "the right to be free from hunger." Unfortunately, hunger and food insecurity are still a daily challenge for too many Torontonians, who struggle to access affordable, nutritious, culturally-appropriate food. Two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have only worsened these challenges and highlighted the ways in which food insecurity is linked to injustice and inequity, including poverty and racism.

One in five households in Toronto are food insecure, and for Black and Indigenous households, that number is one in three. During the pandemic, calls to 211 for emergency food services increased 600%, and we experienced our City's highest month of demand ever for food bank assistance.

The status of food insecurity could be even worse, if not for the long history of organizing, advocacy, and action in our city. Toronto has been at the forefront of global work on urban food policy, establishing the Toronto Food Policy Council in 1991, and with the unanimous approval of Toronto's Food Charter by City Council in 2001. The Toronto Food Strategy, led by Toronto Public Health, was established in 2010. And when the pandemic struck, emergency support programs were rapidly rolled out including opening libraries to food banks and distributing food hampers to thousands of Toronto families in partnership with the Red Cross and United Way.

With the benefit of a world-leading vaccination rate, we can begin to turn our attention and collective resources more fully toward learning from the pandemic, addressing its effects on our communities, and planning for a stronger, healthier, more equitable city. City staff are currently working to create the Poverty Reduction Strategy 2023-2026 Term Action Plan, which is planned to incorporate the City's food security objectives, in coordination with the Black Food Sovereignty Plan and the Reconciliation Action Plan.

One critical piece to add to this work plan, as identified by organizations active on food policy and the right to food, including Food Share, is to update Toronto's Food Charter, which is now more than 20 years old. A renewed charter will be the foundation and guiding document to ensure that our collective actions are coordinated toward shared goals, and a measuring stick to be certain that we are seeing through our commitments with the necessary work and accomplishments.

This motion requests that City of Toronto staff update Toronto's Food Charter as an integral part of the ongoing work on the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy 2023-2026 Term Action Plan, starting

fundamentally by engaging and working with residents and community groups working actively on these issues, and those who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, poverty and other inequities in our food system. The new version of Toronto's Food Charter should include plans for implementation, mechanisms to ensure City Council's accountability, and resourcing to put these plans into effect.

A lot has changed in our City since the original charter was approved in 2001. Our population is 20% larger, our recognition of the necessity for serious work toward anti-racism and reconciliation has deepened, we have adopted new forms of communication and community, and we are recovering from a global pandemic unprecedented in living memory. It is time for Toronto's Food Charter to reflect the Toronto of 2022, for all of us.

Recommendation

1. City Council request the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, to engage and work with residents disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, poverty, and other inequities in our food system, and with community groups working to defend the food rights of their communities, to update Toronto's Food Charter and report back on revisions to Toronto's Food Charter with plans for implementation, accountability, and resourcing as part of the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy 2023-2026 Term Action Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Cressy', with a long, sweeping underline.

Joe Cressy