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EX 9.5.39

Toronto Youth Food Policy Council comment – EX9.5 – TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy – Executive Council Meeting Oct. 20, 2015

The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, a council formed to advocate on behalf of the youth voice in municipal food issues, would like to comment on the relationship with food insecurity and poverty in Toronto. It fully endorses the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy recommendations that seek to eradicate poverty in Toronto's communities.

Hunger and poverty go hand in hand. We live in a system where food is sold as a commodity, and so households with marginalized incomes may not have enough to eat. Some may be surprised that the majority of food insecure households are working households, but chronically low wages are prohibitive to balancing the financial demands of living in the city. This means that some people in this city are faced with the choice of having enough money for rent or having enough money to put food on the table. *No one should be faced with that choice.*

Our government social assistance programs aren't working, either. A new report authored by Toronto-based community organizations shows that 1 in 4 children in Toronto live in poverty. This figure hasn't changed since 2013. At the same time, food bank use has been increasing steadily over the years, and peaked at nearly 900,000 users last year. Food banks are not a solution to hunger. Rather, they are a reaction to a more serious, systemic issue, which is that people do not have agency to feed themselves. When people do not have ownership over how they feed themselves, they are not free to make choices that are important to their communities, their families, and themselves.

We are tired of hunger statistics, and we don't need them to tell this story. We see and feel the effects of poverty every day. We need an effective Poverty Reduction Strategy when we know young people are having difficulty concentrating at school without good food to feed the mind. We need an effective Poverty Reduction Strategy to ensure that residents have control over what they put in their bodies. We need an effective Poverty Reduction Strategy in one of the wealthiest cities in Canada to take leadership on basic human rights issues. *Food is a basic human right.*

In conclusion, the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council recommends that City Council passes, without delay, the Poverty Reduction Strategy on November 3. Thank you for your time.