

City Council**Motion without Notice**

MM24.42	ACTION			Ward: All
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Declaring Food Insecurity an Emergency - by Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Councillor Rachel Chernos Lin

** This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.
* This Motion is not subject to a vote to waive referral. This Motion has been added to the agenda and is before Council for debate.*

Recommendations

Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Councillor Rachel Chernos Lin, recommends that:

1. City Council declare food insecurity an emergency in the City of Toronto.
2. City Council direct the City Manager to consider this emergency declaration in ongoing and future work related to food insecurity such as the City of Toronto’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, Food Charter, and School Food Program.
3. City Council request the Provincial Government to immediately increase its base funding to existing school food programs and increase its financial commitment to enable the expansion of school food programs to additional schools to build a universal school food program.
4. City Council request the Provincial and Federal Governments to act to address the causes of food insecurity by:
 - a. enhancing and indexing to inflation income security programs such as Employment Insurance, Old Age Security, Canada Child Benefit, Canada Disability Benefit, Ontario Works, and Ontario Disability Support Program;
 - b. promoting decent work through secure, quality jobs, living wages, and workplace benefits; and
 - c. joining the City of Toronto in further investing in building and maintaining deeply affordable housing.
5. City Council forward this item to all Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Parliament who represent Toronto ridings, as well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Ontario Public School Boards Association, and the National School Board Association for information.

Summary

When I was a Child Advocate of Toronto, many years ago, I asked the children of Toronto what would be one thing they would do if they were mayor. Lots of them suggested parks and playgrounds. But Sylvia, a 5-year-old, said she would “ask god for more money to buy groceries.” Sylvia experienced hunger and watched her mom run out of grocery money. She knew what it was like to go to school on an empty stomach. Every day she was more focused on her hunger, than her teachers.

In a city as prosperous as ours, these stories are far too common. Things are tough. And as the cost of living soars, this is increasingly impacting our kids. Food bank visits in the Greater Toronto Area are up 51 percent from last year. One out of three of these users are children.

The City of Toronto steps up every day to help feed over 230,000 kids through the school food program. I’m proud of my own work in getting that program off the ground and continuing to improve it. At this meeting alone, we voted to ensure 8,000 more kids will be fed at school starting in January. That means fewer hungry kids, and badly needed savings for parents.

Yet we must recognize how serious the problem is today and commit ourselves to doing even more to confront it. That is why City Council has committed to a phased-in approach to a universal school food program, including a universal mid-morning meal by the 2026 to 2027 school year and a universal school lunch program no later than 2030.

This matter is urgent as action is needed from all orders of government, particularly as the 2025 to 2026 budgets are prepared at the Federal and Provincial levels.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM24.42

(<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-251743.pdf>)