Jeff Burch Niagara Centre
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Dear MPP Jeff Burch,

I am writing to you as an individual deeply concerned about a serious public health problem – household food insecurity (HFI). In 2017-2018, this problem affects more than 4.4 million Canadians including more than 1.7 million Ontarians and will only get worse with soaring inflation rates. I urge you to stand behind income policies that have been proven to effectively reduce food insecurity.

HFI is inadequate or insecure access to food due to household financial constraints. Individuals and families struggling to put food on the table also struggle to afford other basic needs. HFI is a sign of poverty and at its root is the lack of adequate and stable incomes for Canadians to make ends meet. Poverty should not exist in a country as wealthy as Canada, where all citizens should be able to achieve their most basic human needs.

Not being able to afford adequate food has profound adverse effects on people's physical and mental health as well as on their ability to lead productive lives. The health consequences of food insecurity are a large burden on our healthcare system. Using Ontario health care cost data, it has been estimated that the 3% of severely food insecure households in Ontario incur an additional $150M per year in healthcare costs compared to those in food secure households. Effective income policies to reduce food insecurity could offset considerable public expenditures on health care in Canada and improve overall health by: reducing demands on healthcare services, decreasing healthcare costs, creating more equitable communities, reducing social isolation and stigma, supporting economic development, improving community connectedness and enhancing student learning and success.

Food charity is NOT a solution to the problem. Food banks may provide temporary food relief but do not address the root causes. Only about one-quarter of households experiencing food insecurity go to food banks and for those who do use them, food insecurity does not go away.

Proven income policy solutions to food insecurity include:

- Higher minimum wage rates
- Increasing social assistance rates
- Reducing income tax rates for the lowest income households
- A basic income guarantee

Such income policies preserve dignity, address the root cause of the problem, give choice of which foods to buy and ensure the basic right to food.

As an elected representative, I call on you to make poverty reduction a priority. Household food insecurity is an urgent public health problem that, if not addressed, will have serious consequences to the health and well-being of citizens, economic progress, and reputation as a province and country. I urge you to stand behind effective income policy solutions that will successfully reduce food insecurity. You have the power to make our province and country a better place for everyone to lead healthier and happier lives.

Sincerely,