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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE: 2025 Food Insecurity Fund Update**

**FROM: Steve Jacques, MScPI, MCIP, RPP, Commissioner of Human Services**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide Regional Council with an update on the 2025 Food Insecurity Fund.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Regional Food Sector Investments: From 2022 to 2024, Regional Council has invested over \$7 million to deliver emergency food to Peel's most vulnerable.
  - Food Insecurity Declared a Crisis: In 2023, Regional Council (RBC 2023-110) declared food insecurity a crisis in Peel.
  - Rising Demand: Peel Food agencies continue to report a 40 to 60% increase in visits year over year.
  - Advocating for Change: Through a whole-of-Regional approach, continued advocacy for policy and funding changes to the Provincial and Federal governments is critical.
  - Impact of Investments: Funding has improved access to emergency food, by contributing to the total procurement of 35% more pounds of food in 2024 from 2023 and serving over 117,574 residents from 2024.
  - 2025 Food Fund Direction: The fund will support the continued emergency food security needs, and also support commitment to community collaboration, inclusivity, transparency, and equity in addressing the multi-faceted challenges of food insecurity in Peel Region.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

Community Investment Program (CIP) is focused on strengthening the social safety net by supporting not-for-profit and community agencies to build safe, livable communities for Peel's most vulnerable residents. Through a budget of \$14.7 million in 2024, the Community Investment Funds provides support for local not-for-profit agencies to successfully deliver community and social services by investing in their core operating expenses, build internal capacity, strengthen business practices, and encourage collaborative partnerships to advance system-level solutions. This funding approach is a unique model across the province and is highly regarded throughout the not-for-profit sector in Peel as being innovative and responsive.

From 2022 to 2024, the Region of Peel has invested over \$7 million in Peel to deliver emergency food to Peel's most vulnerable residents. In 2022, Peel Region became one of

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first regional governments in Ontario to support food insecurity (RCB2021-74) through allocating \$4 million over two years to assist with capital and operational needs to better serve those in need in Peel. In 2023, Regional Council (RBC2023-110) declared food insecurity a crisis in Peel with direction to amend the 2024 budget to support an additional \$2 million to fund food banks. An additional \$1.34 million was invested to support the food providers through CIP's operational three-year Core Funding (i.e. note this is year 1 (2024) of 3-year core funding).

### a) Food Insecurity in Peel

As of April 2024, 8.6 percent (123,660) of Peel's population lives in poverty, including 9.5 percent (27,900) of children ages 0 to 17 years<sup>1</sup>. Poverty and insufficient financial resources have been directly linked to food insecurity, however, in 2023, approximately 23 percent of Peel residents were impacted by some level of food insecurity<sup>2</sup>. The difference in the rates of poverty and food insecurity reveal an alarming trend that food insecurity in Peel is experienced by residents both above and below the official poverty rate with more than 1 in 5 households experiencing food insecurity.

The situation with food providers in Ontario, particularly in Peel, have worsened for the eighth year in a row. Food inflation rates of 3-5% have pushed the average family's 2025 annual food bill to \$16,834 an increase of \$801.56 compared to 2024<sup>3</sup>. In 2024, food providers reported increased service demand of 40-60% compared to the previous year. Food Banks Mississauga reports serving 1 of 13 residents in Mississauga<sup>4</sup>, Knights Table reports serving 1 of 16 residents in Brampton<sup>5</sup> and Caledon – The Exchange food bank is reporting a 43% increase with 27% being first time users<sup>6</sup>. To date, Provincial and/ or Federal governments have provided limited project-based funding (Ontario Trillium Foundation) having community-based organizations (CBO's) rely on ad-hoc grants, donations, and fundraising as their primary source of revenue to deliver food programming.

### b) Regional Advocacy and Collaboration

As one of the most culturally diverse Regions in Canada, Peel is uniquely challenged in ensuring all residents impacted by food insecurity have reliable access and availability to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. Root causes contributing to the rising rates of food insecurity include housing affordability issues, inadequate social assistance, precarious employment, rising cost of living, climate change and low wages. These critical issues disproportionately impact specific vulnerable groups including, Black, South Asian, and Indigenous households, newcomers and asylum claimants, children, seniors, single individuals and female-lone parent households, and individuals with disabilities and complex needs.

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<sup>1</sup> 2Canada's Official Poverty Dashboard of Indicators: Trends, April 2024 (statcan.gc.ca)

<sup>2</sup> Public Health Ontario, Household Food Insecurity Snapshot (PHU 2019 to 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Public Health Ontario, Household Food Insecurity Snapshot (PHU 2019 to 2023)

<sup>4</sup> Food Banks Mississauga, Annual Report 2024

<sup>5</sup>Knights Table, Annual Impact Report 2024

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Community Investment is working through a whole-of-Regional approach (income and social support, housing, government relations, poverty, early childcare, health, community safety and wellbeing, climate change, public works, food sovereignty and justice), with a poverty reduction lens to address food insecurity in Peel. Advocating for policy changes is crucial, included as Appendix I is a list of Regional food security initiative examples. Access to food is a human right<sup>7</sup>. Staff will continue to advocate to different orders of government and build strong cross-divisional partnerships to align regional food security priorities working towards achieving sustainable, systemic change in Peel.

### 2. 2022-2024 Food Fund Impacts and Reach

Community Investment is aligned with the Region of Peel's Community Investment Service Outcome "Community groups in need have support to deliver services to Peel residents". The Food Fund results are below.

#### a) 2022-2023 Food Fund

The Food Security Capital and Innovation Fund, a \$4 million investment, over two years, funded 17 agencies. This initiative significantly enhanced local food banks' capabilities, expanding food distribution space by 56,000 square feet and tripling chilled storage capacity, and serving 267,709 Peel residents. The Brampton Food Hub, launched in the last quarter, served 15,115 unique clients.

#### b) 2024 Food Security Fund

The Food Insecurity Fund, a \$2 million investment funded 8 agencies. Due to the impending dissolution of the Region in 2024, a targeted low-barrier, population-based formula was used to allocate funds, aligning with prevalence of individuals living under the poverty line and high shelter costs across Peel. The fund was instrumental in addressing immediate and systemic food insecurity challenges, supporting expansion, operations, transportation and distribution solutions. It contributed to the procurement of approximately 35% more pounds of food in 2024 compared to 2023, serving 117,574 Peel residents.

An additional \$1.34 million was invested to support the food providers through CIP's operational three-year Core Funding (i.e. note this is year 1 (2024) of 3-year core funding).

### 3. 2025 Investments in Food Sector:

The Region's 2025 budget approved \$4.34 million in investments in the Peel food sector. Breakdown: 1) \$1.75M from reserves; 2) \$1.25M through CIP base food funding; and 3) \$1.34M invested to support the food providers through CIP's operational three-year Core Funding (i.e. note this is year 2 (2025) of 3-year core funding).

The Fund will be agile and consist of a two-pronged approach.

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<sup>7</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations (Article 25)

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- a) **Emergency Food Insecurity Fund (April 2025)** – The Fund will provide emergency, one-time funding to food agencies that have identified urgent needs. All funding will adhere to strict guidelines, eligibility and a review of an agency’s organizational health and risk tolerance. All emergency funding will be assessed on a case-by-case basis with Director and Commissioner authority and approval. All successful approved funding will be pro-rated and aligned to the 2025 Food Fund.
- b) **Food Insecurity Fund (July 2025)** – The Fund will be an equitable, outcome-based fund that addresses Peel’s food insecurity needs. Although food insecurity cannot be eliminated through community-level interventions, the 2025 Food Insecurity Fund aims to maximize available resources, enhance collaboration, and improve effectiveness and efficiency of service-delivery to improve outcomes for Peel residents.
- c) **Community-Based Design Approach:** A Community Advisory Board of 10-14 diverse community food providers has been established to collaboratively co-design the development of the Fund with the Region through an inclusive, transparent, and equitable process. The Advisory is comprised of leadership from community-based food programming agencies, anchor academic experts, community development coaches, and internal Regional partners to ensure outcomes and the funding allocation formula meet the needs of Peel’s diverse community. An engagement framework will collect feedback from the broader Peel Food community-based organizations and residents with lived experience.

### RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The not-for-profit sector in Peel plays a crucial role within our broader human services system, acting as a vital support network. It has proven to be an essential safety net, especially as it has absorbed increasing demands for services and coordinated efforts to assist the most vulnerable members of our community. Investing in Peel’s not-for-profit sector will help to build more resilient and safe communities. Community Investment staff will also continue to work with Metamorphosis Network to advocate to the various levels of government and funders for increased investment for the Peel not-for-profit sector to meet growing demand for services.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications from this report. Regional investment in food security is included in the Community Investment service budget, funded through base funding and temporary funding from reserves.

### CONCLUSION

Food insecurity in Peel is a multifaceted issue, affecting a significant portion of the population, even those above the official poverty line. Addressing this issue requires a combination of emergency food relief, long-term systemic change, and a focus on community-driven solutions. By working collaboratively across sectors—government, nonprofit, community organizations,

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and local businesses—Peel can create a more equitable, resilient food system that supports all residents.

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I – Regional Food Security Initiatives

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