September 11, 2026

RE: Implementation of 2026/2027 Food Security Initiative Funding

Dear Members of the Board of Governors and the UBC Administration,

The Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver (AMS), Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver (GSS), Students' Union Okanagan of UBC (SUO), and Graduate Students' Association of UBC Okanagan (GSA) welcome and appreciate the University's commitment of $1.2 million toward Food Security Initiative (FSI) funding for the 2026/27 fiscal year. However, we have significant concerns regarding the allocation and disbursement of these funds, **including the decision to direct the additional $400,000 toward the Food Prescription Program**, as well as the absence of a multi-year commitment to maintain the $1.2 million funding level, both of which are inconsistent with the understanding established through student advocacy and subsequent discussions with the University.

Throughout the latest budget cycle, student leaders across UBC were exceptionally clear in our advocacy for increased and sustained investment in student food security. The AMS, GSS, and SUO were united in calling for a **multi-year commitment of $1.2 million in annual FSI funding to support student-led food security initiatives** across both campuses. This degree of alignment across student societies is significant.

Food security was independently identified as a leading budgetary priority by student representatives at both campuses to meet the unprecedented increase in usage of our respective student-led initiatives. During the 2025/26 academic year, the AMS Food Bank recorded **27,552 visits from 2,125 students across just 82 days of operation**,[1] the highest level of use in its history and a continuation of sustained growth in demand. Similar growth is observed in other student-led initiatives across both campuses, such as the SUO's Pantry and the GSS' Acadia Food Hub.

We welcomed the University's engagement with this advocacy priority as a continuation of the long-standing precedent of placing student leadership at the centre of decision-making surrounding disbursement of FSI funding, a priority that students consistently rank among their top three financial concerns each year.[2] This has long been understood by the Administration, which committed to the Board in March 2023 that "decisions on prioritization of funding allocations rests with the student groups and not with the Administration."[3] Elected student leaders collectively represent more than 72,000 students across both campuses and operate the frontline services that FSI funding has historically supported. Each of these initiatives are sustained by years of experience understanding the unique needs of the student body they serve, positioning student societies to best determine how these funds should be allocated to meet those needs.

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[1] Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver, *2025/26 AMS Food Bank Annual Report* (2026), 4.
[2] Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver, *2026 Academic Experience Survey Report* (2026), 9–10; *2025 Academic Experience Survey Report* (2025), 8–9; *2024 Academic Experience Survey Report* (2024), 17–18; *2023 Academic Experience Survey Report* (2023), 12.
[3] UBC Board of Governors, *Minutes of the March 2023 Board of Governors Meeting* (March 2023), 5.

UBC's approved 2026/27 Budget states that "an additional $400 thousand" will be directed to food security programming, bringing annual funding to $1.2 million.[4] Throughout the process, in conversations with the Administration, it was verbally communicated to student leaders that this commitment aligned with the ask we had advanced: to further support student-led food security initiatives. Student advocacy for this priority brought the scale and urgency of student food insecurity to the University's attention and helped shape the subsequent decision to invest an additional $400,000 in this area. Redirecting those funds to the University-led Food Prescription Program without consulting the elected student leaders who advocated for them represents a significant departure from the long-standing precedent of student involvement in FSI funding decisions and from what was communicated throughout the budget process.

We are therefore deeply disappointed to have since learned, on August 20, that the additional $400,000 will not be disbursed as we understood and will instead be directed through a pilot program administered by the Office of the Vice-President, Students. While the Food Prescription Program (FPP) was publicly announced on May 29 alongside RBC's $3.5 million gift[5], no financial information was provided indicating that the additional $400,000 in FSI funding would also be used to support the pilot. Instead, UBC emphasized the scale of the RBC contribution, described as the largest gift RBC has made to a post-secondary institution, and noted that it would support three initiatives, including the Food Prescription Program. In the absence of any disclosure about the use of FSI funding, student leaders had no reason to understand that funding we had advocated for would also be directed toward this program.

While we appreciate the University's efforts to address food insecurity, the Food Prescription Program introduces additional bureaucracy into accessing basic food supports by requiring students to disclose their food insecurity through services offered through the Office of the Vice-President, Students, be assessed for risk, and then receive 10 to 12 meal swipes for use in UBC dining halls. **This departs from the low-barrier and non-judgmental model of student-led food security programs, which do not require students to prove or explain their need as a condition of accessing food.** For a student unwilling to disclose that status, for which there are legitimate reasons not to, FPP is not a viable option to access food in circumstances of insecurity. This is particularly concerning for the most vulnerable members of the student community, such as international graduate students, who account for 51% of AMS Food Bank visits despite comprising only 7% of the student population.[6] Requiring an international student, already part of a community that can experience significant isolation and vulnerability, to articulate personal hardship through a screening process may further alienate them from seeking support, while directing a mature graduate student to redeem meal swipes in an age-incongruent first-year residence dining hall, risks further stigmatizing food insecurity rather than addressing it with dignity. The model is also poorly suited to students supporting partners or dependants who cannot benefit from an individual dine-in meal swipe, while the funding itself ultimately circulates back through UBC-operated dining services rather than strengthening the broader range of direct food security supports students already rely on.

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[4] University of British Columbia, *2026/27 Budget* (March 2026), 31, https://vpfo-finance-2024.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2026/03/2026_27_UBCBudgetReport.pdf.

[5] University of British Columbia, "UBC Launches Food Prescription Program with Gift from RBC," *UBC News*, May 29, 2026, https://news.ubc.ca/2026/05/ubc-launches-food-prescription-program-with-gift-from-rbc/.

[6] AMS, *2025/26 Food Bank Annual Report*, 10.

We recognize and appreciate the University's increased investment in addressing student food insecurity and welcome new approaches that meaningfully improve access to affordable and nutritious food. However, **these efforts need not be mutually exclusive, and new approaches to addressing food insecurity should complement, rather than compromise, commitments previously made to existing student-led programs.** We therefore urge the Board of Governors to honour the commitment as communicated to student leaders by maintaining the full $1.2 million in annual FSI funding for student-led initiatives across both campuses on a multi-year basis, and to **provide transparent clarification on how the Food Prescription Program is being funded**, including how much of the $3.5 million RBC gift is supporting the pilot, **the timeline through which the program was developed and approved**, and **what student consultation, if any, informed its planning and implementation**.

At its core, this issue extends beyond a single funding allocation. Students must be able to trust that when they engage with the University in good faith, align on clear priorities and receive commitments in response to that advocacy, those commitments will be honoured in a manner consistent with how they were communicated.

Sincerely,

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