



## PRESS RELEASE

# Governor Healey Declares State of Emergency, Calls for Support for Newly Arriving Migrant Families

Administration calls on federal government to expedite funding and work authorizations Migrant Families Relief Fund established by United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Boston Foundation to support new arrivals Additional ways to help available at mass.

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Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities

## MEDIA CONTACT

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**BOSTON** — Governor Maura T. Healey today declared that a state of emergency exists in Massachusetts due to rapidly rising numbers of migrant families arriving in Massachusetts in need of shelter and services and a severe lack of shelter availability in the state. The declaration serves as a notice to the federal government and the Commonwealth that the state's shelter system is rapidly expanding capacity in an unsustainable manner, and that further assistance is urgently needed. There are currently nearly 5,600 families or more than 20,000 individuals in state shelter, including children and pregnant women.

In a [letter \(/files/documents/2023/08/08/Emergency%20Declaration%20Letter\\_0.pdf\)](#) to Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, Governor Healey pointed to work authorizations as a primary driver of the crisis. She called on the federal government to take urgent action to streamline and expedite work authorizations and increase funding to states to assist in providing shelter and services to families. She called on bipartisan leaders in Congress to address outdated and punitive immigration laws. She also called on the cities and towns, charities, advocates, faith organizations and providers to continue to partner with the administration to meet the need for shelter and work. Information about how the public can help is available at [mass.gov/sheltercrisis](https://mass.gov/sheltercrisis). Anyone who can offer assistance should contact the state at [shelterhelp@mass.gov](mailto:shelterhelp@mass.gov) (<mailto:shelterhelp@mass.gov>) or by dialing 211, which will be monitored by MEMA.

The administration recently launched the [Immigrant Assistance Services \(IAS\)](#)

[program \(/news/healey-driscoll-administration-awards-175-million-for-new-immigrant-assistance-services-program\)](#), which provides case management, legal services and other support for families in state shelters. This program, not yet replicated in any other state, is providing an unprecedented level of legal support toward asylum, work authorization, and other legal steps to help new arrivals integrate into Massachusetts. The state is also working to establish new and innovative pathways for new arrivals to secure work. The Massachusetts federal delegation also recently [wrote](#)

[to](#)

<https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senator-warren-massachusetts-delegation-urge-biden-administration-to-streamline-work-authorizations-for-new-arrivals-paroled-into-the-united-states>

Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Director Ur M. Jaddou urging them to expedite and streamline the work authorization process.

“State employees and our partners have been miracle workers throughout this crisis – going above and beyond to support families and using every tool at their disposal to expand shelter capacity by nearly 80 percent in the last year. But in recent months, demand has increased to levels that our emergency shelter system cannot keep up with, especially as the number of families leaving shelter has dwindled due to a lack of affordable housing options and barriers to securing work,” said **Governor Maura Healey**. “I am declaring a state of emergency in Massachusetts and urging my partners in the federal government to take the action we need to address this crisis by streamlining the work authorization process and passing comprehensive immigration reform. Many of the new arrivals to our state desperately want to work, and we have historic workforce demands across all industries. I am also calling on all of our partners – from cities and towns to the faith community, philanthropic organizations, and human service providers – to rise to this challenge and do whatever you can to help us meet this moment.”

"Our Emergency Assistance system is designed to be a temporary, emergency safety-net program. It is not equipped to handle the demand that we have seen in recent months. While we have made herculean efforts to expand capacity as much as possible, we've reached a point where the expansion is unsustainable," said **Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll**. "We know what it will take to truly address the root causes of this emergency – rapidly increasing housing production across the state and implementing comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level, including work authorizations. We invite our partners in the federal government and across the Commonwealth to join us in advancing these solutions and supporting all families in Massachusetts."

In her letter, the Governor pointed to several primary drivers of this emergency, including federal policies on immigration and work authorizations, inadequate production of affordable housing over the last decade, and the end of COVID-era food and housing security programs. As a result, the demand for emergency shelter in Massachusetts has skyrocketed over the past year. Today, nearly 5,600 families, including very young children and pregnant women, are living in emergency shelter, many of whom are migrants who recently arrived in Massachusetts. That's up from around 3,100 families a year ago. Meanwhile, the number of families leaving emergency shelter for safe, permanent housing has dwindled, in large part due to a lack of affordable housing options.

"Teams of people from EOHHS have worked with our colleagues across state government relentlessly pursuing creative ways to provide essential resources for families in need, many of whom are new arrivals to Massachusetts," said **Health and Human Services Secretary Kate Walsh**. "We are committed to supporting these resilient families as they find new opportunities in our state."

"Over the past year, the teams at EOHLC have been able to expand emergency shelter capacity and support more families than ever before. But now we confront significant challenges. Our service provider partners are stretched beyond their means, and it has become increasingly difficult to add new shelter units to our EA portfolio," said **Housing and Livable Communities Secretary Ed Augustus**. "The health and well-being of the families in emergency shelter are our first responsibility and we will continue to place eligible families when units become available. I thank the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor for leading an empathetic and collaborative approach to addressing this crisis, and I thank the communities and shelter service providers who have partnered with us in this incredible, ongoing effort."

The administration also announced that the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and The Boston Foundation have launched the Massachusetts Migrant Families Relief Fund to help ensure that new arrivals in Massachusetts have their essential needs met. More information can be found at [unitedwaymassbay.org/migranrelief](https://unitedwaymassbay.org/migranrelief). The Fund will:

- Rapidly deploy emergency financial assistance through our trusted network of human services and shelter organizations in the Commonwealth to ensure individuals, children, and families have access to essential needs (temporary accommodations food, clothing, diapers, hygiene items, transportation).
- Fund livelihood opportunities and assistance such as health screenings, translation services, legal assistance, work authorizations, ESOL classes, and other socio-economic and cultural integration supports.
- Support the local community-based organizations providing direct services on already-stretched budgets and staff resources.

"As we face this unprecedented stress on our shelter system, we must embrace our collective responsibility to care for those individuals and families in need of housing and support, and to work in partnership with cities, towns and civic and community organizations leading this work," said **M. Lee Pelton, President and CEO of The Boston Foundation**. "We are honored to join the Healey Administration, the United Way and the roster of community leaders who are tirelessly working to ensure the dignity, safety, and health and wellbeing of these new arrivals."

"We are committed to demonstrating we are a welcoming place for our newest arrivals and to connecting them to the resources and support needed to work and thrive," said **Bob Giannino, President and CEO at United Way of Massachusetts Bay**. "By working together, we can ensure every person in Massachusetts has their essential needs met and is treated with the dignity and respect we would all want for our own families. We are proud to stand with the Healey-Driscoll Administration and The Boston Foundation to mobilize and distribute resources with urgency and compassion to address this humanitarian crisis."

Since taking office in January, the Healey-Driscoll Administration has taken a whole-of-government approach and utilized every resource at its disposal to expand shelter capacity and support families. The administration created a standalone housing secretariat and dramatically expanded staff and resources dedicated to address this crisis. The Emergency Assistance system spread to more than 80 communities, added thousands of new units of emergency assistance housing, launched new shelter sites, including activating 50 National Guard Members at Joint Base Cape Cod, and created Family Welcome Centers to serve as central intake centers to connect families with shelter and services. Despite these efforts, demand has continued to rise at a pace that the Emergency Assistance system cannot sustain.

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### Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll

Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll are committed to bringing people together and making Massachusetts a place where every worker, business and family can succeed.



### Executive Office of Health and Human Services

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services is comprised of 11 agencies and the MassHealth program. EOHS seeks to promote the health, resilience, and independence of the nearly one in every three residents of the Commonwealth we serve. Our public health programs touch every community in the Commonwealth.

### Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities

The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) was established in 2023 to create more homes and lower housing costs in every region. EOHLC also distributes funding to municipalities, oversees the state-aided public housing portfolio, and operates the state's EA family shelter.



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