

Hi, My name's Maya Milic-Strkalj, and I'm here with Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network (BIJAN). I'm here today to strongly urge the Emergency Assistance Commission to reverse the recent changes made to emergency housing programming (including the 5-day limit on overflow shelter, the punitive 6-month bar if a family chooses to access overflow shelter, the 9-month limit on shelter access, and the capped number of families allowed in EA shelter), and instead ensure that all families that are in need of housing in this state are able to access such housing.

BIJAN is a network that supports individuals, families and community that are navigating the horrors and harms of ICE detention and our immigration system. Every single day since the recent changes in access to emergency shelter, BIJAN volunteers and community have been showing up to support migrant families who are being forced to sleep in unsafe conditions at train stations, airports and in the streets. BIJAN is supporting these children and families because our state of Massachusetts is failing them and is actively choosing to do so. When families have to choose between being housed in emergency overflow shelter for a maximum of five days and then become ineligible for emergency assistance shelter for 6 months, or getting on a waitlist for emergency shelter and sleep outdoors in the meantime, there is no safe option to choose to keep one's self and one's family safe.

The state of Massachusetts has a tendency to pride itself on being a progressive state, and yet, our liberal Governor has implemented policy changes that fall far more in line with right-wing policies that are anti-migrant, anti-Black and anti-unhoused folks because of their direct and ongoing harms to these communities. Massachusetts is one of the wealthiest states in one of the wealthiest countries, so Governor Healey's and our state's excuses about lack of finances are not accurate and shelter could be provided to everyone in need in our state if they chose to do so. As an example, our Governor and state could choose to stop investing in criminalization and putting aside millions for building another prison, and choose instead to invest in community and in housing people in places that aren't jails and prisons.

We are urging the Emergency Assistance Commission and the state to immediately shift course, reverse the changes made to access to emergency housing and start providing shelter options for everyone who needs housing in this state. This is especially urgent given the impending colder weather that will only worsen families' struggles. Thank you.