



CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

Dominick Pangallo
Mayor

Report on the Demobilization of the Emergency Assistance Shelter at Salem State University's South Campus

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Prepared by Lori Stewart, Neighborhood Stability Coordinator, Office of the Mayor, City of Salem

Background

Massachusetts is a "Right to Shelter" state by law. Massachusetts is among the few states with a "right to shelter" law guaranteeing emergency shelter for homeless families who meet specific eligibility requirements, subject to appropriation from the Legislature, per Section 30 of Part I, Title II, Chapter 23B of the Massachusetts General Laws. Emergency housing is only provided to eligible families with children and pregnant women. The Massachusetts family homelessness system is called the Emergency Assistance (EA) program and is operated and overseen by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). Massachusetts covers the cost of emergency shelter services for eligible families, including eligible expenses for education, food assistance, medical care, and other basic needs. Those costs are borne by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and MassHealth, respectively. Many EA families' food costs are also paid through SNAP benefits.

Massachusetts has seen a steady rise in shelter demand due to an influx of families that are new arrivals to the state. This fact, coupled with the lack of affordable housing for existing housing-insecure families in Massachusetts, has put a strain on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter program, which does not have sufficient capacity to meet this demand. As a result, the Commonwealth began to work with communities to house families temporarily — both migrant and existing unhoused residents — in need at alternative housing sites until the system can stabilize and, where possible, permanent housing options can be secured for families in need.

The Bates Shelter, located at 20 Harrison Rd. on the campus of Salem State University, was one of the first Emergency Assistance (EA) sites set up in late 2022 to accommodate this surge of homeless families. The City of Salem, Salem State University (SSU), and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) and its contractor Centerboard, a family shelter provider for the Salem area, began utilizing the vacant former residential units in the Bates Complex on SSU's South Campus as temporary housing on November 30, 2022. The agreement for this temporary use was from late November 2022 until March 2024. The agreement to use the Bates shelter was extended by three months, but the sale of the South Campus property prompted the closure on June 30th.

Composition and Purpose of the Task Force

The Demobilization Task Force was formed in February 2024 at the request of Salem Mayor Dominick Pangallo. While discussing the Demobilization of the Bates Shelter with Massachusetts' Lieutenant Governor Kimberley Driscoll, who was the immediate past mayor of Salem and in office when the agreement to host the shelter in Salem was made, the mayor decided to form a task force led by his office to oversee a successful demobilization of the site by moving the resident families into more permanent/independent housing. Lieutenant Governor Driscoll committed to assigning a staff person from EOHLC to participate in the task force. The goal of the Demobilization Task Force was to work with city partners to combine federal, state, and local programs and services in a thoughtful way to make it possible for families to exit the EA shelter system and minimize displacement.

The task force had 40 members comprised of representatives from the City of Salem staff, including staff of the Salem Public Schools, state legislators, EOHLC staff, housing agencies, the local community assistance agency, and other social service representatives, English as a second language teachers, representatives from Salem State, local real estate agents, legal service providers, faith-based leaders, health care workers, mental health care providers, and state employment agencies. (See Appendix A)

The goal was to create a task force to work directly with the individuals to get them successfully housed in permanent housing in Salem or one of the surrounding communities. This work aligned with Salem's objectives in tackling homelessness. Our first meeting was on March 26, 2024. At the time, the Bates shelter was serving 104 families.

From the outset, it was apparent that the goal was to find shelter for Bates residents before the June 30th closing date. Still, two types of shelter were being sought simultaneously: permanent shelter and interim (EA shelter). Because Massachusetts is a right-to-shelter state and time limits on EA shelters signed into law by the Healy Driscoll administration in April had not yet gone into effect, the residents of Bates had a right to continue sheltering somewhere in the Massachusetts EA shelter system when Bates closed. Both EOHLC and the City of Salem hoped that the residents of Bates would find permanent housing. Both shelter objectives were worked on simultaneously.

Centerboard employs case managers who work on a permanent housing strategy with their residents, including working with local housing authorities and private landlords to find available units, rental assistance programs, and subsidies for families. They also work on the barriers to securing permanent housing (e.g., affordability, credit issues, availability, and immigration status). Centerboard and EOHLC began to work on interim shelter options within Centerboard's portfolio of EA shelter units or elsewhere in the EA shelter system with another provider. This effort involved partnerships created by EOHLC with other shelter providers. Both housing plans (interim and permanent) involve or consider many things, especially transportation and logistics for relocating families, school, and job placement.

We also hoped to mitigate the trauma of another displacement by finding permanent homes whenever possible and not settling on an additional move to a new EA shelter. The residents of the Bates shelter had experienced all the things that homelessness brings, like loss of community, routines, possessions, privacy, and security. These families needed to make significant adjustments to shelter living, such as the need to reestablish a home, interpersonal difficulties, mental and physical problems, and child-related difficulties, such as illness. They are more vulnerable to other forms of trauma, such as physical and sexual assault, witnessing violence, or abrupt separation. Trauma becomes cyclical. Individuals who have already been traumatized before becoming homeless can become retraumatized, and homelessness has its trauma, resulting in a cycle that is tragically damaging and costly to both individuals and communities.

Results

The Demobilization Task Force met every other week for seven meetings and stopped meetings on June 18, 2024. Meetings were informational, community building, progress, and reports on challenges, and all residents were moved out by June 30, 2024. Many unhoused families stayed in Salem and moved into different EA shelter spaces in Salem and nearby cities like Lynn and others. The transition/transfers for these families were as follows:

- 48 Families were transferred to scattered sites in Lynn.
- 17 Families were transferred to scattered sites in Salem.
- 10 Families were transferred to scattered sites in Haverhill.
- 6 Families were transferred to scattered sites in Lawrence.
- 1 Family was transferred to a scattered site in Beverly.
- 1 Family was transferred to a scattered site in Chelsea.
- 8 Families were transferred out of Centerboard by EOHLC.
- 1 family moved into a permanent unit in Salem at Pequot Highlands.

Barriers to permanent housing

Community Teamwork Incorporated (CTI) and MetroHousing|Boston administered the vouchers released by EOHLC for the Bates residents (and many others), and even though EOHLC made it clear that the Bates families were a priority, not one of the 56 who was given a voucher was able to lease up a permanent apartment between February 16th when the voucher was released to Bates residents and the close of the shelter on June 30th. Several families were in the process of leasing up but were placed in temporary EA shelters until the lease up was complete and they could move in. Centerboard paid potential landlords to hold units in the process of being leased using Strategic Rehousing Initiative (SRI) funds from EOHLC because the process is too long. Landlords are not willing to lose money waiting for the process to happen. Additionally, EOHLC offered landlords a \$4000 incentive, which “is for a landlord’s willingness and commitment to lease to an EA Exit voucher holder (the 4k can cover expenses incurred by the voucher leasing process such as administrative delays, repairs to pass inspections, and rent negotiations).”

Getting a voucher is a complex multiple-step process, from referral to voucher briefing, then finding a unit and lease-up. This process has an estimated timeline and involves multiple agencies, unhoused families, and private landlords. The entire voucher system is slow, and vouchers were not processed promptly. Aside from the voucher process being too slow, families still struggle to get an apartment in a market with few vacant units. Additionally, the voucher holder must compete for available units with other folks with an advantage, such as established credit scores, rental history, landlord references, etc. While these are issues for all residents of Bates, this holds especially true for migrant families.

Successes

The task force was able to leverage local resources outside of the two entities charged with demobilizing the shelter (EOHLC and Centerboard). EOHLC leveraged major

resources like state and federal resources, especially vouchers. The task force leveraged local resources that would not have played a role if the task force was not created, specifically real estate agents, faith-based groups, and legal services. The real estate agents on the task force met with several Bates families individually. They continued to work with Centerboard staff and residents to find permanent housing for those residing in EA shelter sites in Salem who formerly lived at the Bates shelter.

Policy Recommendations

- Produce more affordable housing units by any means necessary.
- The voucher process should be streamlined: Getting a voucher is a multiple-step process, from referral to voucher briefing, then finding a unit and lease-up. This process has an estimated timeline and involves multiple agencies, the unhoused family, and private landlords.
- Increase and train more staff at agencies processing vouchers.
- Improve the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program by removing burdensome regulations, incentivizing landlord participation, and allowing more vouchers in higher-opportunity areas. These improvements are spelled out in the bipartisan “Choice in Affordable Housing Act” and other investments to expand rental assistance, ensuring everyone has a stable, accessible, and affordable home. Rental assistance should be universally available to all households in need. Accompanying solutions include Congress significantly expanding and guaranteeing funding for Housing Choice Vouchers and/ or a renters’ tax credit. Rental assistance is a critical tool for helping the lowest-income people afford decent, stable, accessible housing, and the program has a proven track record of reducing homelessness and housing poverty. Because of decades of chronic divestment by Congress, only 1 in 4 households who qualify for housing assistance receive it, and most are left to fend for themselves. Congress should fully fund the costs to cover the needs of all eligible households. Additionally, to help ensure that people with the lowest incomes and the most marginalized have stable, affordable homes, renter protections should be strengthened. For a list of recommended renter protections to enact, please see Appendix D.
- Increase landlord participation in the HCV program by investing \$500 million to increase voucher holders’ housing choices and improve access to high-opportunity areas. Offer incentives to landlords, including signing bonuses,

security deposit assistance, and financial bonuses to public housing agencies (PHAs) that retain dedicated landlord liaisons on staff.

- Require Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to expand its 2016 rule requiring the use of Small Area Fair Market Rents in certain metropolitan areas to increase the value of rental assistance, reduce inspection delays, and refocus HUD’s evaluation of PHAs to promote an increase in the diversity of neighborhoods where vouchers are used.
- Allow public housing authorities (PHAs) to use funding to cover the cost of security deposits and holding fees, extend search times for families to find a landlord, etc.
- Support other models for rental assistance, including cash assistance provided directly to the tenant (so that the landlord isn’t involved) or a fully refundable renters tax credit to put more money directly into renters' pockets.

Appendix A: Timeline

October 2022: Former Gov. Charlie Baker's administration raised the alarm about the state’s Emergency Assistance shelter system. He sought “urgent federal government assistance” to resettle 133 immigrant families. At the time, state data showed 3,412 families in the EA system.

August 8, 2023: the Healey/Driscoll Administration declared a state of emergency due to a severe lack of shelter in Massachusetts. The number of families seeking shelter had risen from 68 per day in March to over 100 by July. In a letter to the Department of Homeland Security, Healey blamed “a confusing tangle of immigration laws, an inability for migrants to obtain work authorization from the federal government, an increase in the number of people coming to Massachusetts, and the lack of an affordable housing supply in our state.” In response, EOHLC released 1200 vouchers for those living in shelters the longest. (1,200 Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) and Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) vouchers designated explicitly for families exiting EOHLC’s Emergency Assistance (EA) shelters (“exit vouchers”).

October 2023: Governor Healey halts expansions of emergency family shelters, declaring the system has hit maximum capacity. She imposes a cap of 7,500 families, or approximately 24,000 individuals, who hit in early November. A waitlist and overflow shelters are later created to house new arrivals.

February 2024: The Demobilization Task Force was formed.

February 16, 2024: 56 vouchers promised by EOHLC in August designated for the residents of the Bates Shelter who had been there the longest were released

March 26, 2024: The first meeting of the task force was held. At the time, the shelter was serving 104 families.

April 2024: Governor Healey signs a law limiting most families' stays in Emergency Assistance shelters to a maximum of nine months. (The law also allocates an additional \$426 million for the program.) Under the new law, families will have nine months to transition out of EA shelters and into stable housing. The nine-month limit will be applied over time, not affecting all families immediately. The first written notices to families that must leave the shelter go out in July. New groups of families will receive written notice to leave the shelter every month after that. Families will get the notice to leave the shelter 90 days before the date they have to go.

May 2024 34 of the 56 families referred for vouchers had completed their applications, and seven were waiting for voucher briefings with Community Teamwork Incorporated and Metro Housing Boston.

June 18, 2024: The last meeting of the task force was held

June 30, 2024: All residents were moved out of the Bates shelter

Appendix B: Eligibility to Apply for Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter

- Residents of Massachusetts
- Family income is 115% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG). A family of four must have a gross monthly income of \$2990 or less.
- You're pregnant or have children under 21.
- The reason you need shelter is one of the following:
 - No-fault fire, flood, natural disaster, condemnation, or foreclosure.
 - Fleeing domestic violence (current or within the past 12 months).
 - No-fault eviction.
 - Your children are exposed to a substantial health and safety risk.
 - A family may include parents or guardians, spouses, siblings, stepparents, stepsiblings, or half-siblings.

Appendix C: Status of unhoused students who enrolled in Salem Public Schools under the McKinney- Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

Homeless children (including migrant youth and unaccompanied youth) are defined in the McKinney Vento Act as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" such as being in a shelter, a motel, hotel, or campground, in a car, bus, or train station, an abandoned building, or some other inadequate accommodations or with other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (also known as doubled up)

Provisions of the McKinney Vento Act include:

- Immediate enrollment, even if the student does not have the required documentation.
- Attend the school they attended when they became homeless or the school they last attended (school of origin).
- Transportation to the school of origin if it is in another district (if appropriate).

Additionally, local school districts must appoint Local Education Liaisons to ensure school staff know these rights, provide public notice to homeless families (at shelters and schools), and facilitate access to school and transportation services.

Salem's McKinney Vento Coordinator provided the following information about school-age students from the Bates Shelter:

- 81 students were housed at 20 Harrison Rd.
 - 6 students have received housing after leaving Harrison Rd.
 - 14 students were placed at shelter sites in Salem after 20 Harrison Rd. closed.
 - 54 students were placed in shelters outside Salem after 20 Harrison Rd. closed (Lynn, Haverhill, Beverly, Lawrence, Brockton).
 - 7 students withdrew during the school year and left the district
- 62 out of the 81 students remain enrolled in the SPS for the 24-25 school year.

Appendix D: Recommended Renter Protections

State:

- Commit to fully funding the Massachusetts Access to Counsel Program

Federal:

- Prohibit source of income discrimination to help ensure that landlords do not discriminate against renters with rental assistance or other sources of income.
- Bar federally assisted landlords from screening out applicants or evicting tenants because of the actions of an abuser and from retaliating against a tenant for calling emergency assistance for help, and ensure survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking have access to safe, accessible homes and the ability to leave unsafe housing situations without risking possible homelessness.
- Provide housing resources to all income-eligible households, regardless of immigration status.

State and Federal:

- Establish anti-rent gouging protections for renters and require landlords to disclose all fees before lease signing.
- Discourage speculators from driving up housing costs.
- Create “just cause” eviction protections to ensure greater housing stability and prevent arbitrary and harmful actions by landlords.
- Expand the Fair Housing Act to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, and source of income.
- Ensure access for people exiting the criminal legal system by ending arbitrary screening and eviction policies, including prohibiting blanket bans and one-strike policies.
- Support tenant organizing.
- Establish the right of tenants to renew leases and for the first right of purchase.