

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE BOSTON, MA 02133
(617) 725-4000

MAURA T. HEALEY
GOVERNOR

KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

August 8, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

I, Maura T. Healey, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, do hereby proclaim that there now exists in the Commonwealth a state of emergency due to rapid and unabating increases in the number of families with children and pregnant people – many of them newly arriving migrants and refugees – living within the state but without the means to secure safe shelter in our communities. This state of emergency arises from numerous factors, among them federal policies on immigration and work authorization, inadequate production of affordable housing over the last decade, and the end of COVID-era food and housing security programs. The need for action is urgent. The state of emergency arising from the shelter crisis demands that I exercise my powers as Governor to protect all the residents of Massachusetts, particularly those who lack access to safe housing.

Right now, more than 5,500 families, including very young children and pregnant people, are living in emergency shelter and receiving supportive services from the state. Many of these families are migrants to Massachusetts, drawn here because we are and proudly have been a beacon to those in need. These families require help to obtain housing, food, medical care, education, diapers, and infant formula. Some are fleeing imminent threats of violence. They all have one thing in common. They are in danger of going without the most basic of human rights in one of the most prosperous places on earth: the ability to lay their heads down in a safe place every night with a roof over their heads and with access to fundamental human necessities. They have called upon us to help give them shelter and the ability to work.

The people of Massachusetts have answered this call. Over 80 cities and towns across our state are hosting these families, including more than 1,800 families who currently are residing in hotels and motels. I am proud of the work that our administration has undertaken to keep many families safely housed. We have created thousands of new units of emergency assistance housing, launched new shelter sites, including at Joint Base Cape Cod, and we have created Family Welcome Centers to help provide services to those who need them. I am heartened that Massachusetts and our administration have used all means at our disposal to make

the right to shelter a reality and to meet our moral responsibility to house our state's most vulnerable residents safely.

But these efforts have not been enough. Over the past six months, the demand for emergency shelter has skyrocketed. In March of this year, 68 families per day were coming to our field offices seeking assistance. By July, that number had jumped to over 100 families per day. By comparison, in March of 2022, only 25 families per day came to our offices to request help. Currently, shelter entries per month are more than double the number of entries per month during the pandemic and roughly one-third higher than pre-pandemic levels. At the same time, the number of families leaving emergency shelter for safe, permanent housing has dwindled. The number of families exiting shelter has declined by nearly two-thirds since 2019. These trends are driven by many factors, including 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.

Although Massachusetts is adding shelter units every week, without extraordinary measures, we fear we will be unable to add capacity fast enough to place all eligible families safely into shelter. Even though we are currently spending more than \$45 million per month on programs to help these families, our ability to create enough new shelter space and to provide necessary supportive services is falling short. Simply put, we do not currently have the tools we need to meet the rapidly rising demand for emergency shelter.

This is why I am today declaring that a state of emergency exists in Massachusetts, one that demands a response by all levels of government. I am directing members of my administration to continue to utilize and operationalize all means to secure housing, shelter, and health and human services to address this humanitarian crisis.

To our partners in the federal government, Massachusetts has stepped up to address what sadly has been a federal crisis of inaction that is many years in the making. But we can no longer do this alone. We need federal partnership, federal funding, and urgent federal action to meet this moment and to continue to serve some of our most vulnerable families. I urge you to continue pressing Congress to take meaningful legislative action and separately, and importantly, use all available executive power to remove the burdensome barriers keeping people from getting work authorizations, address our outdated and punitive immigration laws, and provide much needed financial assistance to help states like Massachusetts address this national issue. These new arrivals desperately want to work, and we have historic demand for workers across all industries.

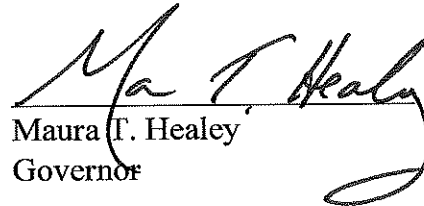
To the cities and towns across the state, many of which have a rich history tied to waves of immigrants settling within their borders, I am encouraging their communities to keep welcoming those families who wish to resettle in all corners of Massachusetts. Likewise, to charities, advocates, faith organizations, and providers, I will continue to affirm both my gratitude for their efforts and the importance of their partnership as we help these families in need through this crisis. And I will continue to commend the people of Massachusetts for

welcoming families into our community as neighbors – our collective compassion and inclusivity is what makes Massachusetts the exceptional place that it is.

While this state of emergency continues, I will use all the powers granted to the Governor to issue recommendations, directions, and orders to address the shelter crisis. These recommendations, directions, and orders will assist with the protection of persons and property; expedite the use of state resources; facilitate requests for aid and assistance from federal, state, and local partners; and enable the immediate procurement and deployment of goods and services necessary to ensure a prompt and effective response to and recovery from this moment of extraordinary need.

But such actions by the Governor, individuals, organizations, and communities are only a beginning. To respond to this crisis, we immediate federal intervention. Please heed this collective call to action. Only by working together can we resolve this humanitarian crisis.

Sincerely yours,


Maura F. Healey
Governor

cc: The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
The Honorable Ed Markey
The Honorable Richard Neal
The Honorable Jim McGovern
The Honorable Lori Trahan
The Honorable Jake Auchincloss
The Honorable Katherine Clark
The Honorable Seth Moulton
The Honorable Ayanna Pressley
The Honorable Stephen Lynch
The Honorable Bill Keating
The Honorable Andrea Joy Campbell
The Honorable Ronald Mariano
The Honorable Karen E. Spilka
Secretary Edward Augustus
Secretary Kate Walsh
Secretary Terrence Reidy