

# Protestors Demand End To Massachusetts Right-To-Shelter Law

By Sam Drysdale

About a dozen protestors rallied on the State House steps Wednesday afternoon and called for the state to end its right-to-shelter law, as Massachusetts' family shelter system has swelled over the past year and is on track to cost the state \$2 billion by next summer.

The protestors held signs reading "HEALEY HOTEL HELL," "END MA SANCTUARY INCENTIVES" and "LAWMAKERS WOKE TAXPAYERS BROKE."

"The right to shelter law and the sanctuary city laws that have been imposed on the state by the State House and by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts create incentives that dig a hole that will never be filled," said Lou Murray, chairman of Bostonians Against Sanctuary Cities.

A 1983 law makes Massachusetts the only state in the country that has a legal obligation to shelter unhoused families, which the state has always interpreted to include noncitizens living in the state.

About half of the residents of the Emergency Assistance shelter system are new immigrants, and the system's dramatic growth by thousands of families in the last year has largely been driven by newly arriving families from other countries, as Massachusetts and the U.S. at large struggle with an immigration crisis.

"It's a twist of the law, that it has to even let people that just come into the state for the sole purpose of shelter to use the right of shelter," Murray said.

The protestors argued Wednesday that the shelter system was “totally overrunning our state budget,” and that ending the state’s right-to-shelter law would slow the wave of new arrivals.

Massachusetts’ emergency shelter costs will approach \$1 billion annually this fiscal year and next fiscal year, according to Gov. Maura Healey’s administration.

“Tax dollars are a precious resource, and what is happening in Massachusetts is entirely unsustainable,” said Henry Barbaro, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition for Immigration Reform. “I think that there are plenty of poor and needy Americans that should come first.”

House Ways and Means Committee Chair Rep. Aaron Michlewitz earlier this week acknowledged the strain on the state budget.

“Massachusetts is also seeing a migrant crisis like like no other state in the nation, one that has put our emergency family shelter system and our budget at a breaking point at the moment,” Michlewitz told members of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts. “And although our fiscal outlook is still pretty strong, and we built up our reserves to record highs, the budget before us today that we’re dealing with is going to be one of the most challenging I’ve had to deal with as the chair.”

Healey capped the family shelter system at 7,500 families last fall, and since then close to 800 families have joined a waiting list hoping for a spot in stable shelter. American citizens do not get priority over those who recently entered the country.

While calling for federal aid and reforms to alleviate the crisis, Healey has also attempted to help families in shelters to obtain work permits so they can become self-sufficient and help employers fill holes in the labor force.

In order to get a spot in the Emergency Assistance system, a noncitizen must have come to the U.S. through legal means, as a refugee, asylum-seeker or through another legal process.

“In Massachusetts, they get a right to shelter, driver’s licenses, in-state tuition. All sorts of things. Gov. Healey should be turning the magnets off, because it’s unsustainable,” Barbaro said.

Citing rising costs, lawmakers in both the House and Senate recently passed bills to put limits on the amount of time a family can stay in the EA shelter system. Both would restrict stays to nine months, with different ideas for exceptions and extensions.

Asked about the idea of cutting shelter costs by placing time limits on family stays, Murray said it was not enough.

“The exceptions to the rule overwhelm the reform, I really think the only thing that we can do right now is to repeal the right to shelter,” he said.

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## **Senator Warren, Massachusetts Delegation Urge Biden to Expedite Visa Process for Haitians**

U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), along with the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Rena

Bitter, urging them to expedite the processing of immigrant visas for Haitians – particularly for relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs). The request comes as Haiti has plunged further into chaos, with gangs reportedly uniting, ousting the country's prime minister, and coordinating attacks that some warn could spark a civil war.

“We write to express our increasing concern regarding consular operations at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti,” wrote the lawmakers. “We urge the State Department to expedite the processing of immigrant visas for Haitians, particularly for relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs).”

Haiti has already struggled with long-standing challenges that have contributed to the deterioration of its security situation, including one of the deadliest earthquakes in modern history, severe corruption, massive protests, and crippling debt. In 2021, the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse plunged the country into a state of unrest. As of 2023, the country has had no democratically elected government, and gangs now control an estimated 80 percent of the capital city. The local population faces skyrocketing rates of homicides, kidnappings, internal displacement, cholera, and starvation.

“As you recently highlighted, Haiti presents ‘one of the most urgent challenges we face as an international community.’ The situation in Haiti demands urgent, creative solutions to ensure that, at a minimum, relatives of U.S. persons can be quickly processed and reunited with their families in the United States,” wrote the lawmakers.

This crisis has led many individuals to seek asylum in the United States. Massachusetts has one of the largest Haitian diasporas in the country, and many Haitian-Americans are desperately trying to sponsor family members still in Haiti. Thousands of Haitian relatives of U.S. citizens and long-term

permanent residents (LPRs) are in the processing queue for family-based immigrant visas. However, the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince – the U.S. government’s only post in the country – has been operating on an emergency-only basis due to the ongoing security crisis and has suspended or greatly delayed the processing of most visa services.

“The State Department must implement stop-gap solutions to more quickly process visas for Haitians in need of urgent protection, even as the U.S. Embassy maintains minimal operations in Haiti,” continued the lawmakers. “We appreciate the scale and complexity of this issue and applaud the work the State Department has already done to explore creative solutions to address the backlog. Still, we urge the State Department to ensure that solutions are implemented with the urgency that this issue demands.”

Specifically, the lawmakers are recommending the State Department implement the following policy and operational changes to visa processing in Haiti, including:

- Waive the personal, in-person appearance requirement, at least for Haitian immediate relatives of U.S. persons.
- Ramp up capacity for processing Haitian immigrant visas at a third-country post.
- Establishing a new location for in-person requirements besides the U.S. embassy, given the particularly high level of unrest in the neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince and the threat posed to those who leave their homes.
- Senator Warren has led ongoing efforts to protect the rights of asylum seekers and other migrants, and to hold the United States accountable to its humanitarian obligations:

In February 2024, Senators Warren and Markey sent a letter to U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations Chair Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Vice Chair Susan Collins (R-Maine), urging them to increase funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Shelter and Services Program (SSP) to \$5 billion in the

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bill for fiscal year 2024.

In February 2024, Senator Warren and colleagues submitted an amendment to the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 that would provide \$5 billion for the FEMA's Shelter and Services Program without requiring U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to ramp up its detention and deportation efforts. Senator Warren worked with Senator Padilla and others to submit a similar amendment to the Fiscal Year 2024 Spending Package in March 2024.

In December 2023, Senator Warren, along with the entire Massachusetts delegation, wrote to FEMA raising concerns about a lack of federal funding for non-border states like Massachusetts experiencing a significant influx of migrants and requesting additional federal SSP funding for the Commonwealth.

In November 2023, Warren, Markey, Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) sent a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Ur Jaddou, about several policy proposals to help address delays in issuing employment authorization documents.

In September 2023, Senators Warren and Markey applauded the Biden administration's redesignation of TPS for Venezuelan migrants.

In August 2023, Senators Warren and Markey and Representatives Katherine Clark (D-Mass.), Lori Trahan (D-Mass.), Seth Moulton (D-Mass.), James McGovern (D-Mass.), Richard Neal (D-Mass.), Stephen Lynch (D-Mass.), Jake Auchincloss (D-Mass.), Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.), and Bill Keating (D-Mass.) sent a letter to Secretary Mayorkas and Director Jaddou, urging them to expedite the processing of EADs for individuals paroled into the United States, which would lessen the strain on available humanitarian and housing resources.

In March 2023, Senator Warren and lawmakers submitted a public comment against the Biden administration's proposed rule to restrict asylum at the southern border. The senators called on the Biden administration to withdraw the rule in its entirety.

In January 2023, Senator Warren and nearly 70 other lawmakers sent a letter urging President Biden to reverse the administration's expansion of the inhumane Trump-era border policy known as Title 42 and to abandon the proposed asylum "transit ban" rule. The lawmakers also encouraged the President and his administration to work with Congress to develop safe, humane, and orderly border policies that enforce our immigration laws and uphold the right to asylum under domestic and international law.

In September 2022, Senator Warren led members of the Massachusetts delegation in a letter to DHS and FEMA calling for funding from the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to be allocated swiftly to organizations assisting newly arrived migrants in Massachusetts.

In September 2022, Senator Warren released a statement condemning efforts to use asylum seekers as political pawns and committing to assisting communities in need.

In November 2021, Senator Warren stated her opposition to the continued use of Title 42 to expel asylum seekers and called for the Biden administration to rescind this policy.

In October 2021, Senator Warren joined Senator Menendez in criticizing the inhumane treatment of Haitian migrants and called on the administration to support long-term stability in Haiti.

In October 2021, Senator Warren called on Chris Magnus to commit to transparency regarding the investigation into the events in Del Rio, Texas during his confirmation hearing to be CBP Commissioner.

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# **Boston Democrat: Shelter Costs Put Massachusetts State Budget At “Breaking Point”**

By Colin A. Young  
State House News Service

As chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Rep. Aaron Michlewitz sits in the catbird seat of budget and policy development on Beacon Hill.

The Boston Democrat offered a glimpse Monday afternoon at the various balls he is trying to keep in the air simultaneously as the 2023-2024 legislative session gets into crunch time ahead of the July 31 end of formal business: emergency shelter policy, the fiscal 2025 budget, Gov. Maura Healey’s housing bond and policy bill, the governor’s economic development bill, and more.

Talking with the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts during an event focused on prioritizing equitable economic development, Michlewitz provided updates on the House’s plans for the remainder of the session and shared his own thoughts on some of the leading issues of the day.

“Massachusetts is also seeing a migrant crisis like like no other state in the nation, one that has put our emergency family shelter system and our budget at a breaking point at the moment,” Michlewitz said. “And although our fiscal outlook is still pretty strong, and we built up our reserves to record highs, the budget before us today that we’re dealing with is going to be one of the most challenging I’ve had to deal with as the chair. As we see declining revenues over the last



couple of months here, the spending pressures on the commonwealth only continue to climb.”

Michlewitz and House Speaker Ronald Mariano will unveil the House’s budget plan the second week of April, and the chairman said it’s been difficult to develop this spending plan because he’s not exactly sure what’s led to state tax collections running \$186 million behind last year and \$275 million behind the year-end estimate that has already been slashed by \$1 billion.

“It’s my sixth budget, going through this. And besides COVID, this is probably the most difficult one. And the COVID budget was kind of easy, in a sense, because you could just point to COVID and blame COVID and say, ‘it’s COVID and we can’t do that right now.’ We can’t really do that right now,” Michlewitz said. “With the declining revenues, we don’t have an exact reason exactly why our revenues are declining the way they have been. And it’s making it, certainly, for a challenging cycle. But we’ll get through it, we’re working through it, we have the resources to do so.”

Among the budget measures Michlewitz previewed were help for school districts that are “still struggling to cope with a declining fiscal picture” despite the 2019 K-12 funding reform law and the continuation of universal school meals. He said that he’s also aiming to preserve the state’s recently-upgraded bond rating, since that will allow the state to borrow money for other priorities at a lower cost.

“A lot of these bills that we’re talking about – whether it’s the housing bond bill, or the economic development bond bill – they’re gonna require us to spend some capital through the bond market. And for us to do that, we have to have a strong rating to accomplish those goals that we want to out of those two bond bills,” he said. “If we don’t do that, we may hit some challenges, we may not reach our entire goals, particularly around housing.”

And housing, the chairman said, is number one “in terms of priorities that we all kind of share” in the Legislature. Though Healey filed a housing bond and policy bill in the fall, Michlewitz said the final product “isn’t going to be a House initiative, it’s not gonna be a Senate initiative, it’s going to be all of us.”

“Now, we may have different pieces of the policy that we may have some disagreements on as we get into the nitty gritty of the bill. But, certainly, the idea that we need to pass something significant that will put us put in a strong investment standpoint, of housing money, putting capital out on the street related to housing, but also creating some policies that will allow that to flourish and grow ... that’s one, definitely, thing that we are agreeing upon.”

Mariano signaled last week that the House may include in its housing bill the authority for cities and towns to impose transfer taxes on real estate transactions above a given dollar amount as a way of generating revenue for affordable housing initiatives. Michlewitz went into detail Monday on the House’s internal debate on the topic.

“One of the challenges with that discussion is that every community has a little different take on what would work. You look at Boston and how Boston operates, and how many properties would be over a million [dollars] or \$2 million, or whatever the threshold would be, versus a smaller city or town which isn’t going to accumulate the same amount of money. Or, maybe a smaller town that’s wealthy, that’s going to accumulate a lot of money that may not be able to put all that money into into building affordable housing, because they may have some zoning issues related to how small their community is,” he said.

Michlewitz added, “These are all things that we’re going to have to weigh ... you’re trying to put a lot of round pegs in the square holes in some respects. And trying to create that

flexibility, I think is something that we're working through."

And with most of his time occupied by work on the budget and the housing bill, Michlewitz said he hasn't had a good chance yet to sink his teeth into the \$3.5 billion economic development bill that Healey filed at the start of the month. But he did draw a line between one part of the bill – a \$1 billion infusion for the state's life sciences sector – and the housing crisis the state is working to address.

"One of the reasons why we're in a housing crisis is because we had such a large growth of population in 2010 to 2020, and didn't have the production of housing at the same rate that we had the population growth, which has obviously created a greater demand and less supply," he said. "And one of the reasons why we had that population growth is because of the life sciences initiatives that grew in the commonwealth through the last 15-20 years, and brought a lot of economic development to us, brought a lot of population to us, brought a lot of energy to the commonwealth."

The chairman added, "So we know how important this is to our economy. We know how important it is to the continued growth of our economy. And we're going to certainly prioritize it as we go forward."

Michlewitz, who hails from the North End of Boston, also shared his view of the dispute playing out between the state and Milton over the town's rejection of a zoning plan that would have complied with the MBTA Communities Act. That law requires communities served by or near MBTA service to adopt zoning that allows multifamily housing by right in certain areas, and the state has sued Milton over its non-compliance with the law.

Michlewitz said Monday that he thinks "the greatest challenge in our housing issues right now and the biggest disease of it is NIMBYism," he said referring to the "not in my backyard"

stance.

“It’s not necessarily policies, it’s people prefer to not have density near them, involved in them or around their community. And I think that trying to balance that discussion, I think, has been one of the biggest challenges that you’ve seen recently,” he said. “And I don’t think that’s anything different to the rest of the country, but certainly, it’s, it’s when we have a limited amount of space here in the commonwealth – we are one of the oldest infrastructures in the country – I think that that’s probably one of the biggest challenges that we’re facing, and I think that that’s taken full center stage in relation to the Milton debate and discussion that’s been going on right now.”

He added, “But it’s not just Milton, there’s other communities that are having a hard time grappling with this conversation directly. And there’s different nuances to each of them and you can’t put one in a one-size-fits-all kind of box. Because Milton has their gripes about this policy, and some of them aren’t the craziest discussions in the world. And I think it resonated amongst the population in Milton during that vote. But there’s other committees that are dealing with this as well.”

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## **OPINION: “Trump moving embassy to Jerusalem enraged Palestinians”**

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*readers whether we agree or disagree with their opinion.*

Do you have a counter opinion to this opinion? Have an opinion about something else? Email us at [info@newbedfordguide.com](mailto:info@newbedfordguide.com).

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**“The right wing Republican pro-Israel stance is not wavering!**

For those liberal Democrats and voters of middle eastern decent, who are withholding or rejecting support of President Biden because he has not taken the final step of advocating for the cessation of military aid to Israel, it would be wise to reconsider their position.

At least there has been some equivocating by Biden as he has incrementally become more critical of Netanyahu and his right wing coalition. Biden’s full throated support for Israel’s response to Hamas, with only tepid recommendations to avoid civilian casualties, has been replaced with public criticism and veiled threats of eliminating aid to Israel. And Biden is publicly rebuking Netanyahu and clearly considering other options to end the war.

The Neo-Cons of old in alliance with the right wing caucus however are providing unequivocal support for Israel’s response to Hamas.

Their steadfast devotion to Israel, with scant consideration of the thousands of innocent Gazans who have lost their lives, is hardly encouraging if disaffected Democrats vote Republican, third party or stay home.

It was Donald Trump who moved the American Embassy to Jerusalem during his presidency, which in no small measure encouraged Netanyahu and his right wing to feel invincible from American criticism and further enraged the Palestinians.

It may seriously conflict with alleged Democratic values by

voting for Biden, but if Trump is re-elected it will be the elimination of a century of progressive legislation that benefitted a majority of Americans, and authoritarian rulers everywhere will rejoice and be emboldened.”-Betty Ussach, Dartmouth.

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## **How politicians distract you from America's \$1 trillion annual national debt interest**

Did you hear that Americans now pay \$1 trillion in interest on the national debt? No? That is by design.

There is nothing more important to America's future than our crushing national debt yet Joe Biden and congress distract us with global warming, Russia, Israel, and Trump trials. Look at this boogey man, but not politicians selling off our future. The Roman politicians figured this out over two thousands years ago; distract the population with wars and gladiators and some free bread while stealing all the wealth. Two men who didn't know each other fighting to the death. Symbolically, today's gladiators are just Democrat versus Republican, liberal versus conservative and black versus white. We pick a side, jump on social media and battle it out with people we don't even know. Sometimes the combat hits the street. Today, we are willing to hate and fight with people we don't even know while our politicians from both parties enrich themselves.

The United States Government is now paying **\$1 trillion annually in interest on the national debt** and that debt is now increasing at a rate of **\$1 trillion every 100 days**. A trillion

is a big number and hard to comprehend so let's see if I can help you understand how big it is relative to the gross domestic product (GDP) other countries and then the consequences of it.

America's nation debt is now at \$34 trillion, twice the size of the world's second largest economy, China. In other words, America's future generations owe twice as much money than the entire Chinese economy and that debt is growing fast. There are only 19 countries on earth with an economy larger than \$1 trillion. Our \$1 trillion interest payment is equal to the size of the entire Saudi Arabia economy (\$1 trillion GDP). We pay annual interest payments that are larger than the total economy of 194 of 213 countries on earth. American tax payers pay more interest than the entire Switzerland economy is worth. You can see the list of countries by GDP [here](#).

\$1 trillion annual interest payments is about \$2.7 billion a day. For some local perspective, the City of New Bedford budget for FY2024 is \$513 million. This means America's daily interest payment is more than five times larger than New Bedford annual city budget. Instead of sending \$500 million to 5 American cities each day, we send the interest payments to the banks and wealthiest in the world who buy up the debt. Is the lightbulb on your head going off yet?

It's important to note that these interest payments are paid off by printing more money and collecting more taxes, which is horrible for Americans. Printing more money leads to more inflation (too many dollars chasing the same amount of goods) and collecting taxes transfers money from mostly the middle class to the wealthiest. China is the largest country outside America holding our debt so you are building their cities with the interest payments, not America's.

Imagine an elderly couple with a combined income of \$100,000 a year with \$120,000 in debt. Instead of paying off the debt, they just pay on the interest and keep spending recklessly

knowing death will come before they'll have to pay off the debt in full. Now imagine their children and grandchildren inheriting the debt and you have an accurate picture of your federal government spending and debt balance. President Biden is 81-years old and overseeing \$1 trillion being added to the nation debt every 100 days and he's asking for more addition spending – nearly \$100 billion for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. He can print more money and raise taxes because the debt will go to the next generations and he'll be long dead before the debt bomb explodes on his grandchildren.

It doesn't matter if you are the horrible politicians who spend the money, or just a person ignoring it, you are equally responsible for destroying our future generations. Stop being distracted and call your local congressman.

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# **Massachusetts Migrant Work Permits Stagnant Since December**

By Sam Drysdale  
State House News Service

Gov. Maura Healey has frequently pointed to getting more migrants authorized to work as a key step in moving people out of the state's overwhelmed emergency family shelter system, but the number of new arrivals who have work authorizations has stagnated since December.

About half of the families in the state's Emergency Assistance family shelter system are newly arrived immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers, many of whom are not authorized to work in



the United States. As the number of immigrants coming into Massachusetts has skyrocketed in the last year, Healey has repeatedly called on the federal government to expedite the work authorization process to help migrants who are eager to work leave state-funded housing and support their families financially.

With family shelter cost estimates of close to \$1 billion per year, both the House and Senate are now considering putting time limits on how long a family can stay in emergency shelter. Shelter limits would add urgency to the need for these authorizations as parents would need to be able to work to pay for housing once they are no longer able to stay in the shelter system.

The House has proposed a nine-month limit on shelter stays, while the Senate will take up a bill later this week to impose a nine-month limit with opportunities for extensions. Either option would be a significant change to the system, where most families stay for over a year, according to the Healey administration.

“The federal government is allowing people into the United States. And my position has been, if you’re going to allow people in, then work with us states on getting people working – expedite those work authorizations,” Healey said last fall.

The administration held two “clinics” in November with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help process work authorizations for shelter residents, where they said they helped “thousands” of new arrivals become eligible to work in the country.

Though the clinics seemed to lead to a sharp increase in work authorizations, that number has since stagnated.

As of Dec. 12, 2023, 813 newly arrived immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers in Massachusetts’ shelter system had federal work authorizations. That number climbed to 2,713 individuals

two weeks later.

Since late December 2023, however, the number of non-citizens living in shelters and able to legally work in the U.S. has remained unchanged, according to reports from the governor's administration.

The most recent report on the EA family shelter system to come out of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities showed that as of March 7, there were still only 2,713 of these individuals with work authorizations.

A Healey aide said the work authorization numbers are derived from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and recommended reaching out to them.

Despite this stagnation, Healey continues to point at the success of the November clinics in expediting this process that she deems as critical to helping people out of shelter and opening up space for other families in need.

At an unrelated press conference at the State House on Monday, responding to a reporter's question about whether the migrant population is an "untapped labor market," Healey replied, "I do. That's why I've focused from the outset on getting work authorizations."

"I'm proud that we as a state have really led when it came to getting folks processed. I called on the federal government to act for a long long time, and I also said we're not going to wait. And so we were able to get folks from DHS here on the ground... That work has continued," she said.

The News Service followed up, pointing out there have been no new work authorizations reported by her office since late December.

"The work does continue... We continue to process people for work authorization," Healey replied. "It's a good thing right

now that Salem Hospital was able to fill its janitorial and cleaning staff. It hadn't been able to do that for years. So we're continuing to look for opportunities."

She did not directly respond to a question on why her administration had not reported an increase in work authorizations over the last three months.

In the time since late December when the number of new migrants eligible to work flatlined, hundreds of families have been added to the waiting list of folks waiting to be let into shelter. Around 400 families were on the waitlist – waiting for a spot after Healey capped the system at 7,500 families last fall. By early March, that number had reached about 780 families.

Earlier this month, the Healey administration announced partnerships with eight resettlement agencies to help families exit shelter by connecting with resources such as housing, job searching and social services. Healey's office said the initiative, funded by money included in last year's supplemental budget, will enable families to access permanent housing.

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## **OPINION: "Massachusetts Gov. Healey's marijuana pardons a win for businesses in need of employees"**

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*ED. In fairness and objectivity, we share opinions from our readers whether we agree or disagree with their opinion.*

Do you have a counter opinion to this opinion? Have an opinion about something else? Email us at [info@newbedfordguide.com](mailto:info@newbedfordguide.com).

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“Governor Healey’s proposed executive pardon of incarcerated people and those previously convicted of simple marijuana possession is fair, humane and definitely will save significant taxpayer funds.

From all perspectives this is a commendable executive action.

It will save taxpayers money that is being expended to incarcerate people who are serving time solely for simple possession. Those previously convicted of possession who have been denied employment, housing, child custody or unsupervised visitation, and other benefits available to the general public, will be returned to a non-criminal status and the onus of conviction will be lifted.

With rampant unemployment in certain business sectors, with hiring signs everywhere, jobs will finally be filled. This will be a win for businesses in desperate need of employees and the taxes paid by those hired will inure to all residents of Massachusetts.

And from a purely humanitarian perspective this is the right thing to do, especially in view of the many states that have de-criminalized simple possession. And once again Massachusetts will lead in removing an unnecessary and unfair impediment that has been shown to disproportionately penalize certain less fortunate members of society.”-Betty Ussach, Dartmouth.

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# **OPINION: “Presidential immunity case ruling in Trump’s favor will be death knell for democracy!”**

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The presidential immunity case is the last opportunity for the Supreme Court to save democracy.

One can hope that the Supreme Court decision denying individual state’s ability to disqualify Donald Trump from the ballot, will be timely followed by a ruling that there is no such right as absolute presidential immunity. The ballot decision, though disappointing to some, was not unexpected and the unanimity of the court supports the position that an opposite ruling would produce great chaos. Legal scholars, as well as legislators from both parties predicted the outcome and were hoping for this ruling.

The presidential immunity case, however, is perhaps the weightiest case to come before the court during this divisive period in American history. It could be argued that democracy

versus autocracy is the real underlying issue and that the justices understand the full import of their decision. If the court ruling is unjustifiably delayed until after the election or decided in Trump's favor it will assuredly be the death knell for democracy."-Betty Ussach, Dartmouth.

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## **Voters upset after Republican ballots were missing at New Bedford voting location**

New Bedford voters in Ward 1, Precinct D, expressed frustration and concern when they discovered that their polling location at Vibra Hospital did not have Republican ballots available in the early morning of Super Tuesday. Reports indicated that while Democrat and Libertarian ballots were present, there were no Republican ballots for voters to use.

*This morning, the New Bedford city election department was notified that Republican ballots were missing from the polling materials for 1D – Vibra Hospital. #mapoli #MassGOP #ElectionIntegrity*

*– MassGOP (@massgop) March 5, 2024*

Joanne Hodgson, candidate for the Republican State Committee, told WBSM on Tuesday morning,

“Apparently when packing the supply boxes, they missed the Republican ballots. The City election department was made aware of the issue by the warden at 7:15 (a.m.), and were able

to rectify it by 7:40, as this precinct is on the other side of the city. Despite having received specific training to count all ballots prior to opening and contacting the election office with any issues, the warden in Ward 1 failed to do that.”

Once the issue was resolved, The Massachusetts GOP took to Twitter noting, “It is unacceptable for any precincts to not have Republican Ballots. Such failures only deepen the distrust between Republican voters and election authorities. Thank you RSC Member Jo-Anne Hodgson for her work to rectify the issue.”

Although the issue has since been fixed, this is not the start to the election season that we hoped for. Needless to mention, there has been rigorous debate the past 4 years over whether there was election interference and voter fraud in the 2020 election. Hiccups like what happened today in New Bedford will just be adding fuel to the already blazing fire.

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## **City of New Bedford highlights “Cadillac” of vote counting machines as elections approach**

“New Bedford is now home to the Cadillac of vote counting machines. The DS450 from Election Systems & Software will help make the process of counting mail-in, early and absentee ballots more efficient.

For example: In November, it took a dozen election workers

about two 12-hour days to hand-feed all the early ballots into a counting machine on the weekend before Election Day. The new high-speed tabulator can now process and count them much more quickly.

How quick? We'll find out on Saturday morning, starting at 9 a.m. at the Elections Office at City Hall, when the public is able to observe the new machine and how it works while we process the early ballots.

**Of note:** nothing is changing on Election Day itself, this new machine is only used for early ballots. **And a reminder:** Polls are open all day on Tuesday, March 5, for the Presidential Primary. Contact the Elections Office with any questions at 508-979-1420."-City of New Bedford.