

# Massachusetts Emergency Assistance Director to migrants: “Our Shelters Are Full”

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State House News Service

Gov. Maura Healey sent her emergency assistance czar and others to the southern U.S. border this week to spread the message that Massachusetts shelters are full and can't continue to take in migrant families who cross the border.

State Emergency Assistance Director Scott Rice is leading a handful of Bay State officials on a trip to connect with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Joint Task Force-North, non-governmental organizations and migrant families at some of the most common points of entry for families that later arrive in Massachusetts: San Antonio, McAllen, Hidalgo and Brownsville, all in Texas.

“This trip is an important opportunity to meet with families arriving in the U.S. and the organizations that work with them at the border to make sure they have accurate information about the lack of shelter space in Massachusetts,” Rice, a retired lieutenant general of the U.S. Air Force, said. “It is essential that we get the word out that our shelters are full so that families can plan accordingly to make sure they have a safe place to go.”

Healey's office said the state's delegation to the border would visit the San Antonio airport, Centro de Bienvenida/San Antonio Migrant Resource Center and Shelter, Ursula Processing Facility in McAllen, Hidalgo Port of Entry, and Brownsville Migrant Welcome Center. In addition to Rice, the group

includes the emergency assistance incident command deputy director, pre-shelter policy lead for incident command, executive director of the MA Office of Refugees and Immigrants, and strategy manager at the Division of Housing Stabilization.

For more than a year, the shelter system that Massachusetts is statutorily required to provide for homeless families has been deluged with an influx of migrant families that enter the U.S. at the southern border and make their way to Massachusetts, often because they are told of the state's right-to-shelter policy as well as services and benefits available to them. Healey declared a state of emergency last August and in the fall implemented a cap of 7,500 families in the state's system.

Healey and the Legislature agreed to a new law this spring to impose a limit on how long families can stay in state shelter, capping it at nine months. State guidance released this month said families who have been in state shelter for longer than nine months could begin receiving notices by early July that they have 90 days to leave and find other housing accommodations. The law allows the state to remove no more than 150 families per month, in addition to those that leave on their own accord.

In its announcement of the trip to Texas, Healey's office said that the number of families exiting the shelter system "has steadily increased each month, with more than 331 families leaving in May – the highest number in years."

Last month, MassGOP Chair Amy Carnevale sent a letter to Healey imploring the governor to push President Joe Biden to address "the most disastrous border crisis in United States history." Carnevale asked Healey to "leverage your relationship with President Biden as a surrogate for his reelection campaign" to close the border until unauthorized crossings stop, reinstitute the "remain in Mexico" policy,

request U.S. Coast Guard patrols of waters off Massachusetts, and more.

“Governor, you are correct when you stated that this stems from a “federal crisis of inaction.” Unfortunately, we are disappointed to see you follow suit with that level of inaction by continuing, like the Biden Administration, to succumb to political pandering and perpetuating this crisis,” the Republican Party chairwoman wrote. She added, “It’s imperative for our nation and the Commonwealth to address and resolve this immigration crisis, bringing the border under control. If President Biden ever plans to get serious about border security, then he needs more leaders in the Democratic Party like you to demand he do so.”