

# Massachusetts Governor Healey: Biden Can Help Put More Migrants Into Jobs

By Alison Kuznitz

State House News Service

With the state's emergency shelter system increasingly strained by the influx of migrant families, Gov. Maura Healey reiterated her call to the Biden administration Wednesday to accelerate the monthslong work authorization process to help more people access job openings.

Healey, whose administration earlier this week opened a second immigrant resource center in Quincy to keep up with the demand among new arrivals and people experiencing homelessness, said in a radio interview Wednesday that migrants want to work and there are a "lot of employers here who want to put them to work."

"I think what we need to do is continue to push the Biden administration for work authorization; we need a streamlined and expedited process for getting people work," Healey said on WBUR. "We had offers when we put families at Joint Base Cape Cod (JBCC), we had employers begging to send up a bus to get people, to bring them back to the Cape to work, to put them to work. The numbers that we're seeing right now are unsustainable unless we figure out a way – the federal government really needs to act here."

Dozens of eligible families seeking aid at the state's Family Welcome Center in Allston have been directed to temporarily stay in townhomes at JBCC.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu in an television interview last month estimated that "potentially hundreds of people are arriving

each day” and heading to Boston Medical Center, among other places, seeking shelter.

Just over 40 hotels and motels in Massachusetts, which is a right-to-shelter state, are being used as emergency shelters, a spokesperson for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities said earlier this week. As of Saturday, 5,356 families were staying in state-funded shelters.

It is unclear how many migrants may currently be waiting for approval to work in the commonwealth.

Immigrants who are paroled into the United States from a border, airport or another port of entry need to apply for work authorization, said Heather Yountz, senior immigration staff attorney at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. Those individuals are allowed to be in the United States due to humanitarian or public benefit reasons, according to the Immigration and Nationality Act.

In a plea largely similar to Healey’s, the state’s congressional delegation urged the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Monday to streamline and expedite the “processing of new arrivals’ work authorization requests,” which can take six months or longer.

“Stakeholders across the state — from local governments to housing nonprofits to legal aid groups — are being stretched to capacity as they work tirelessly to meet the needs of immigrant families that are left housing insecure because they cannot work legally and support themselves during their periods of parole,” lawmakers wrote in a joint letter. “The federal government can help relieve the strain on available resources in the Commonwealth by removing obstacles new arrivals face when trying to work legally.”

Healey said the commonwealth’s migrant situation is not “unique,” as she noted other states are also seeing “huge

numbers of people” coming from Central and South American countries, as well as Haiti. The Biden administration understands “the urgency of the moment,” Healey said.

“We’re going to continue to press them,” Healey said on WBUR. “I think there is a real recognition there. The question is: Are they going to help at this point?”

Meanwhile, the federal government on Tuesday announced new guidance aimed at helping stateless noncitizens who are trying to access immigration benefits or have submitted “other requests” to USCIS, according to a news release from the DHS.

Stateless noncitizens are not legally considered citizens of any country, which means they “may be denied legal identity, and struggle to access education, healthcare, marriage, and job opportunities,” DHS said. New policies and procedures will be established for officials tasked with determining people’s status and making decisions about their applications or benefit requests, the agency said.