

# Migrant “Crisis” Spurs Opening Of New Center In Quincy, Massachusetts

By Alison Kuznitz

State House News Service

More than five weeks after the Healey administration pledged to establish more resource centers to help migrant families and people experiencing homelessness, state officials opened their second site in Quincy on Monday as makeshift hotels and motels being used as emergency shelters continue to fill up.

The new “Family Welcome Center” is situated at the Cove Fine Arts Center on the campus of Eastern Nazarene College. It comes as the state grapples with a surge of migrants coming to Massachusetts, which is a right-to-shelter-state, from Haiti and South America. State officials and refugee advocates have been unable to pinpoint the volume of migrants arriving here due to a lack of standardized data collection methods.

“This second Family Welcome Center will help increase access to services and expedite the rate at which we are able to connect eligible families experiencing homelessness with safe and secure shelter,” Gov. Maura Healey said in a statement Monday morning. “We’re grateful for the hard work and collaboration of staff, providers and local officials who are going above and beyond to support families in need.”

When the Healey administration established its first Family Welcome Center above the Brazilian Worker Center in Allston on June 23, officials said in a press release that the “administration is working to open additional Family Welcome Centers in other areas across the state in the near future.” But for weeks, spokespeople for Healey have not been able to say how many more centers may launch and where they would be

located.

At the Allston center, some eligible families were diverted to stay in townhouses at Joint Base Cape Cod, which could support up to 60 families. Within a week, the base was nearing capacity as it housed 53 families, comprising 179 individuals.

Eligible families who come to the new resource center at the Cove Fine Arts Center will be enrolled in MassHealth, the government-funded health insurance program, and other state benefits, according to the Healey administration. The center is operated by Bay State Community Services and teams from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Healey administration said.

The Quincy center will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on weekends. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kate Walsh toured the center Monday morning, alongside EOHHS Director of Policy for Children and Families Allison Bovell-Ammon and Lenita Reason, executive director of the Brazilian Worker Center, which is operating the Allston welcome center.

A dorm at Eastern Nazarene College will also be used as a shelter to house up to 58 families, with operations helmed by AMI Expeditionary Healthcare, which the administration said is a state-contracted shelter management firm that provides “support services for newly arrived migrants across the U.S.”

There are 55 rooms in the dorm and three apartments. The building has free laundry machines and common areas, and state officials say the space “will be furnished with child-appropriate activities.”

“As this crisis continues, I appreciate Eastern Nazarene for being so willing to provide not only a Family Welcome Center, but also opening a dorm to provide on-site shelter,” Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll said in a statement. “Communities across Massachusetts are finding ways to meet immediate needs of

these families. Through this unprecedented challenge, cities and towns are working together to help their neighbors in unprecedented ways. I look forward to continued collaboration as we work together to find a long-term solution.”

Costs related to the crisis are stacking up. In March, Healey signed off on a supplemental budget allocation of \$85 million for emergency assistance. And the fiscal 2024 budget accord reached Sunday night includes \$325 million for emergency assistance family shelters.

Karissa Hand, a Healey spokesperson, wouldn't say how many additional centers may open across the commonwealth to keep up with the influx of migrants.

“We're continuously working to expand as necessary to meet the demand for services and shelter,” Hand said in a statement to the News Service.

The Allston center has helped more than 550 families access shelter, food and other basic necessities, as of July 27, the Healey administration said. State officials didn't immediately respond to News Service questions about how many families have stayed at Joint Base Cape Cod since last month, as well as how many are currently sheltering there.

Separately, 43 hotels and motels around Massachusetts are being used as emergency shelters – a slight bump from 39 in mid-July – a spokesperson for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities told the News Service Monday. Overall, 80 municipalities across the state are “hosting families” as part of the emergency assistance program, the official said.

There were 5,356 families in state-funded shelters as of Saturday, the official said, including 1,737 families in hotels and motels.

Over the weekend in Framingham, more than a dozen “asylum-seeking” families were directed to a hotel.

Mayor Charlie Sitsky, elected city and state officials, and other stakeholders worked with state agencies and local nonprofits “to coordinate the immediate needs of these roughly 40 individuals,” city officials said in an alert Sunday. Driscoll was also “in touch” with Framingham leaders, according to the alert.

“I want to thank all the many volunteers who stepped up over the weekend providing services to these asylum seekers from Haiti,” Sitsky said in a statement. “I appreciate everybody’s desire to help, but at this time we are asking the public to wait at least a day until we can finish assessing the needs of these families.”

Meanwhile, the state’s welcome centers are accepting donations, including wipes, strollers, new car seats, portable cribs, diapers of all sizes, formula, powdered milk, toothbrushes, toothpaste, body wash, unscented Dove bar soap, deodorant, CeraVe baby lotion, Vaseline, individual packets of Pedialyte and Target giftcards. They can be dropped off at the Brazilian Worker Center at 14 Harvard Ave. in Allston or online; or at A New Way Recovery Center at 85 Quincy Ave. in Quincy or online.