

FACT SHEET
Emergency Assistance Program in Massachusetts

Massachusetts is a “Right to Shelter” state by law

Massachusetts is among the few states in the country with a “right to shelter” law guaranteeing emergency shelter for homeless families who meet certain eligibility requirements, subject to appropriation from the Legislature, per [Section 30 of Part I, Title II, Chapter 23B](#) of the Massachusetts General Laws.

Emergency housing is only provided to eligible families with children and pregnant women

Only families with children and/or pregnant women are eligible for placement in state emergency shelter.

Emergency Assistance services are funded by the state

The Massachusetts family homelessness system is called the Emergency Assistance (EA) program and is operated and overseen by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). Massachusetts covers the cost of emergency shelter services for eligible families, including eligible costs for education, food assistance, medical care, and other basic needs. Those costs are borne by DESE and MassHealth, respectively. Many EA families' food costs also are paid through SNAP benefits. In August 2023, Governor Healey signed the FY24 GAA, which funded the EA system at \$324m.

Massachusetts has seen a steady rise in shelter demand

The emergency shelter system has had to expand each month since August 2022 in order to meet increases in need, as the result of factors such as rising housing costs in every region, and new arrivals to the state. Additionally, with an increasingly tight housing market and significant delay in federal work authorizations, more families are experiencing homelessness and fewer are exiting shelter in a timely manner into their own stable, permanent housing.

Expanding shelter capacity and permanent housing requires local, state, federal partnership

Non-profit service providers help oversee state-run family shelters for 3,600 families in permanent shelter units statewide. Since late 2022, the Commonwealth has also provided shelter for more than 2,000 families in temporary hotel and new permanent sites. EOHLC is working with local, federal and state partners to help shelter eligible families, including by increasing the [HomeBASE benefit](#).

New statewide coordinated approach will help meet increased needs

In May 2022, the administration implemented an Incident Command Structure, which includes the Governor’s Office, Administration and Finance, Health and Human Services, Housing and Livable Communities, Public Safety and Security, Labor and Workforce Development, and Education in order to incorporate a cross Cabinet approach to meet growing EA shelter needs. Additionally, new leadership at the Office of Refugees and Immigrants was installed to help better accommodate the unique needs of the rising number of new arrivals.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Emergency Assistance Program in Massachusetts

What does it mean to be a “right to shelter” state?

Massachusetts is among the few places in the country with a “right to shelter” law for homeless families, meaning low-income Massachusetts families with children under 21 or pregnant women who meet certain eligibility requirements have a legal right to shelter. Because of this law, Massachusetts has one of the lowest rates of unsheltered family homelessness in the country.

What is required for a family to qualify for emergency assistance?

Families without a safe place to stay may be deemed eligible if they meet the following criteria:

- Be a resident of Massachusetts, and be living in the U.S. with the knowledge and consent of the Department of Homeland Security
- Meet the gross income standards and asset test for Emergency Assistance
- Have children under the age of 21, or be pregnant

The reason for homelessness must be one of the following:

- No-fault fire, flood, natural disaster, condemnation, or foreclosure
- Fleeing domestic violence (current or within past 12 months)
- No-fault eviction
- Child(ren) are exposed to a substantial health and safety risk

What are the income requirements to qualify?

The household must have gross monthly income equal to or less than 115% of the Federal Poverty Level adjusted for household size. The household's total countable assets must also not exceed \$5,000. For a family of three, for example, they must have a household income under \$2,382 per month.

What is the nature of families currently accessing emergency shelter in Massachusetts?

The majority of families in the EA system are local Massachusetts families who are experiencing homelessness. However, today over half of new families applying for shelter are new arrivals, which is defined as families without citizenship or a green card who arrived in Massachusetts in the last 30 days.

To be eligible for shelter, at least one household member must be a citizen, a green card holder, or be present in the U.S. with the knowledge and consent of the Department of Homeland Security, meaning individuals have made lawful entry into the U.S.

How long do families stay in emergency shelters?

EOHLC and its non-profit partners will work with families to help rapidly place them into stable housing of their own. There is no minimum or maximum length of stay, and the EA system seeks to rehouse families as quickly as possible. Families exiting the shelter system in 2023 had stayed in shelter an average of 14 months.

Will EOHLC provide advance notice to municipalities when expanding emergency shelter locations?

EOHLC strives to provide local and state officials with as much advance notice as possible when

siting an emergency shelter and regularly meets with local partners to coordinate service delivery and address local concerns.

Families seek shelter at all hours of the day and often into the evening. It is of the utmost importance that families are provided with shelter as soon as possible and while we work hard to provide local officials with notification of placements within their communities, sometimes notification occurs just before or after families have been sheltered.

How many municipalities are currently sheltering eligible families?

As of September, more than 80 municipalities across Massachusetts currently host homeless families.

Why are hotels being utilized in some communities?

There is a critical shortage of available shelter beds. EOHLC is working to increase shelter capacity through every available avenue. The use of hotels and motels is required when there are no other available options for immediate placement needs.

Why are multiple families being housed within one hotel location?

Congregate settings are strongly preferred to make it feasible for service providers to assist families effectively. Families need access to food, formula, diapers and other necessities, as well as access to services and supports.

Are hotels going to be used as a long-term solution?

No, using hotels and motels for shelter is a last resort, interim solution to meet our legal obligations to provide emergency shelter. Our goal is to connect families with safe, secure, long-term housing.

How are the emergency family shelters managed?

Typically, congregate emergency shelters have a 24/7 on-site service provider that coordinates families' access to food and other necessities and arranges building security, routine cleaning and maintenance, case management, connections to resources, housing search assistance and the coordination of direct care.

Our preference is to have on-site service providers at all shelter sites. But because of the growing numbers that have outpaced existing EA infrastructure, the state has created "Supplemental Shelters" which do not have a designated service provider, and are instead supported by limited state staff and, in some cases, the Massachusetts National Guard. Because of the growing numbers that have outpaced existing EA infrastructure.

Will my municipality be covered for school costs?

A school receives emergency aid for transportation, enrollment, and other extra costs for educating EA students at a daily rate of \$104 per student. Service providers and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) work with impacted school districts to ensure that the educational needs of any school-aged child living in an emergency shelter are met as quickly as possible, consistent with the McKinney-Vento Act requirements under federal law.

Earlier this year, Governor Healey signed a supplemental budget that allows school districts to receive emergency aid more quickly for costs associated with educating children placed in new shelters. Otherwise, the districts would have had to wait much longer for funding for these students to be incorporated into their state education aid.

Are other homeless families being displaced from shelter or hotels to meet the needs of migrant arrivals?

No, the Administration works to ensure that no person or family currently living in a hotel or motel is displaced as a result of our efforts to shelter families in need.

When a hotel or motel is in negotiations with the state to offer shelter services, EOHLC staff have worked with hotel ownership and/or individuals or families already living in the hotel to ensure they do not lose their housing or are offered alternative arrangements.

Please explain what happens when the Administration offers hotels/ motels a higher rate for EA stays thereby displacing constituents living in hotels/motels.

The Administration does not offer a higher rate than the advertised rate set by the hotel. The Administration works to ensure that no person or family currently living in a hotel or motel is displaced as a result of our efforts to shelter families in need.

Are migrants moving to the top of the EA list and forcing existing families off the list onto the CHAMP system. If not as a matter of process, how is the Administration ensuring this doesn't happen in practice?

No, the Emergency Assistance shelter system is distinct and separate from the state's public housing system. CHAMP is the application through which a family or individual applies for state public housing; the homeless preference in CHAMP is set by statute and is distinct from EA eligibility.

A family could apply for Emergency Assistance and separately apply for public housing via the CHAMP system, but both processes would occur independent of one another.

Is there any other relief available?

School districts are also able to apply for DESE's [Emergency Support Grant](#) for students placed in new emergency shelters. This grant provides \$1,000 per student for immediate needs such as laptops, school supplies, tutors and other supports the district identifies.

Will the children be enrolled in the public school where the shelter is located

While some of them may, others will not. Some children will not be school-aged and others are already enrolled in other school districts in Massachusetts and will continue to attend those schools. Under federal the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless children are guaranteed access to school in either their host community or home community, where feasible, based on what is best for the child to ensure access to education.

How does the state support children in the EA system who are enrolled in school?

Every school district across the state has a homeless liaison who ensures that children who are homeless have access to a public-school education. Liaisons facilitate enrollment, ensure

students are connected to appropriate educational and support services including free school meals, and refer families to community services.

Is it possible to change the date of reimbursement for schools? If so, how?

For the current school year, the DESE has adjusted the reimbursement schedule from one annual payment at the end of the year to four quarterly payments. Additionally, the per pupil rate now allows for the inclusion of the new EA students. We expect the first payment to get to Districts in December.

DESE is pursuing all other options for funding for districts.

Is DESE updating districts on a regular basis on the number of new students in their district and the associated cost?

Yes, as part of our municipal outreach, DESE is reaching out to school superintendents as sites are brought online as well as providing daily updates to the families placed in the shelters within their respective districts. In addition to this outreach to superintendents, DESE's State Homeless Liaison is reaching out to each school district's Homeless Liaison. DESE is also providing guidance and technical assistance to assist with student transitions.

How will meals be provided?

In sites with dedicated service providers, those providers identify and partner with vendors to either provide food service if families do not have access to cooking facilities or aid them in securing groceries – often leveraging benefits like SNAP – if they do have access to kitchens/kitchenettes. In some situations, at Supplemental Shelter sites, arrangements are made with hotel staff or local community-based organizations to provide meals prepared off-site to family shelter residents. In some communities, service providers partner with local restaurants to provide meals for families.

Is language assistance being provided?

EOHLC provides free over-the-phone language translation services, service providers seek to hire – and many have already - multilingual onsite staff.

Are there additional services for newly arrived immigrants?

In May 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration awarded \$1.75 million to implement Immigrant Assistance Services (IAS), a new program designed to assist newly arrived immigrants with work authorizations and services. IAS is a collaborative program between EOHLC and the Office of Refugees and Immigrants (ORI), administered by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA). Funding will better ensure access to immediate advice and referrals, targeted and more comprehensive case management, legal services, and other support for which they may be eligible.

How does the budget support emergency shelter needs?

The FY24 GAA allocated \$325 million for the EA program, which funded 4,700 shelter units (a 31 percent increase over FY23 capacity, depending on final per-unit costs). Earlier this year, Governor Healey signed a supplemental budget proposal to provide additional support for

schools absorbing new students and new funding to expand the shelter system. If appropriated, the \$250 M supplemental budget filed on September 13, 2023, would provide:

- \$130 M for direct shelter and associated services for the remainder of FY24 to support the current caseload of approximately 2,300 additional families (~6,400 families currently in shelter – 4,100 families funded in the FY24 budget) -- Note: HLC attempts to maintain a 14% buffer between number of families in shelter and number of units to accommodate large families requiring more than one-unit, offline units, and regional flexibility
- \$33 M for Temporary Emergency Shelters at Joint Base Cape Cod and Eastern Nazarene
- \$87 M for other wraparound services and community supports, namely reimbursements to school districts accepting additional students and Family Welcome Centers at Eastern Nazarene and the Brazilian Worker Center

Is the state paying the hotel tax?

The state is paying all local occupancy taxes for room rentals less than 90 days. The room tax is either paid directly by the state or it is factored into the contract the state has with EA service providers who then pay hotels.

The state is using a relatively small percentage of hotels for shelter. We estimate that only 3% of Massachusetts hotel rooms are being used for shelter, based on Office of Tourism and Travel data. We are actively exploring options to reimburse communities who have experienced a loss in hotel excise revenues as a result of long term shelter contracts and expect to notify communities of this effort soon.

What resources are provided to parents and students at colleges and universities where buildings are being used to shelter families?

College and university leaders have communicated with their faculty, staff, students, and parents about the use of the campus dorm buildings and provided necessary information for ensuring smooth operations on the campus.

Is there a way to publicly access the number of families in real time?

A public shelter data dashboard displaying the current caseload is forthcoming and will be updated regularly. Data will be provided for informational purposes only and it is subject to change and/or correction. HLC remains the repository for data and this data will be provided in a timely manner upon request.

Is there a one-stop-shop for information regarding volunteering, contracts with vendors, etc?

People can visit [Mass.gov/sheltercrisis](https://www.mass.gov/sheltercrisis) to learn more about the EA shelter system and shelter providers in their communities who may have volunteer opportunities.

FISCAL QUESTIONS

Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 appropriated \$44.9M for the EA program and \$40M for a reserve for school costs associated with homeless families. How much has been spent and what are the run-out dates for each account?

Of the \$44.9 M appropriated for the EA program in Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023, \$29.4 M was spent on shelter in FY23. This leaves \$15.5 M that will roll into the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund when the FY23 Accounts Payable rolls are complete. Across the \$47 M in A&F reserve funding appropriated in Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023 (1599-0924 and 1599-0925), approximately \$41 M is available to support FY24 costs.

What is the current projected run out date for the \$325M appropriated to the EA program in the FY24 budget?

The EA program line item will be depleted in January 2024 at the current rate of shelter expansion (assumes caseload grows at a rate of 25 families per day, consistent with the trend observed over the last two months). If the supplemental budget is supported, that would fund our current caseload through the end of the fiscal year. HLC will continue to monitor expansion trends and how that impacts financing. Run-out dates for some of the other activities not funded in the FY24 budget – Temporary Emergency Shelters, Hotels and Family Welcome Centers – are likely to occur this fall.

What is the current projected deficit in FY'24 for the program and what are the caseload projections being used to calculate the runout date and projected deficit?

The supplemental budget the Administration filed last week supports our projected end-of-September caseload (~6,400) through the end of the fiscal year. HLC continues to monitor expansion trends and the implications for financing. Trends continue to change and we are committed to continuing to monitor our intake and exit trends and communicating material changes in our projected need for FY24.

Additionally, the Administration has said the current system is less expensive than MEMA-style congregate settings: Does this assume both that the state will experience a decline in arrivals and that spending in MEMA-style congregate care facilities would not be a meaningful long-term investment?

Given current trends, we do not expect a decline in arrivals. The current Supplemental Shelter system is less expensive on a per family per day basis than MEMA-style congregate settings. Standing up MEMA-style congregate shelter sites is very costly due to the services needed to be accommodated on site.

In addition to programmatic costs, what other costs are associated with the influx of new arrivals? And are those costs covered in the Supp. Funding request?

Caseload is by far the most significant cost driver. The supp request is comprised of:

- \$130 M for shelter & associated services, including lodging, food, basic needs (e.g., formula, diapers)
- \$33 M for Temporary Emergency Shelters at Eastern Nazarene and Joint Base Cape Cod
- \$87 M for other wraparound services and community supports, namely school district reimbursements and Family Welcome Centers at Eastern Nazarene and Brazilian Worker Center, in addition to health and immigration supports, such as rapid response nursing, mobile vaccines, health assessments, and work authorization services.

How long will the \$250 million last?

The \$250 million supplemental funding request will only fund the predicted caseload we expect to see at the end of September, approximately 6,600 families, at our *current operations* through the end of the Fiscal Year 2024. *Current operations* includes the costs associated with existing temporary emergency shelters, supplemental shelters, family welcome centers, and projected school reimbursements. It would also provide funding for a new Community Coordinator grant program for municipalities.

Do we have a list of vendors or consultants (current or anticipated)?

EA Providers

- Brookview House
- Cambridge Y
- Catholic Charities Boston
- Catholic Social Services Fall River
- Center for Human Development
- Centerboard
- Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
- Children Services of Roxbury
- Citizens Inn
- Community Action of CCI
- Commonwealth Care Alliance
- Community Teamwork I
- Developmental Disabilities. MA
- Dimock
- Economic Mobility Pathways
- Eliot Community Health Services
- Emmaus
- Family Independence
- FamilyAid
- Father Bills and Mainspring
- Friendly House
- Friends of the Homeless
- Heading Home

- Hildebrand
- House of Hope
- Housing Assistance Corp.
- Housing Families
- JRI
- Lynn SA
- Making Opportunities Count
- Middlesex Human Services Agency
- Neighborworks Housing Solutions
- North Shore CAP
- Old Colony Y
- Plymouth Area Co.
- Project Hope
- SEMCOA
- Service Net
- SMCWC Crossroads
- Sojourner House
- South Middlesex Opportunity Council
- St. Mary's
- Valley Opportunity Council
- Victory Programs
- Way Finders
- Wellspring
- YMCA of Greater Boston

Other EA Services

- Internal Security Association – Field office security
- Transaction Associations – Transportation services
- TransPerfect Translations – Translation services
- Spinelli’s Ravioli Manufacturing Co. – food at supplemental shelter sites – emergency contract in process
- Accenture – consulting

Temporary Emergency Shelter

- Eastern Nazarene – rent
- AMI Expeditionary Healthcare – operations at Eastern Nazarene Temporary Emergency Shelter
- Deployed Resources – operations at Joint Base Cape Cod

Family Welcome Centers

- Bay State Community Services – operations at Eastern Nazarene Family Welcome Center

- Brazilian Worker Center – operations at BWC Family Welcome Center

Active / In Progress RFRs:

- Shelter Providers: [Bid BD-23-1076-OCDDE-HS003-85657](#)
- Hotels & Motels: [Bid BD-23-1076-OCDDE-HS003-87275](#)
- Catering Services: [Bid BD-24-1076-OCDDE-HS003-92012](#)