



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Healey Declares State of Emergency: Calls on federal government for support to new migrants entering the commonwealth

On Tuesday August 8th, Governor Maura Healey declared that a state of emergency exists in Massachusetts due to the rising number of recently arriving migrant families in need of shelter and services. Along with this declaration, Healey appealed to the federal government for financial support, immigration reform, and expedited processing of work authorizations. In a [letter](#) to Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, Governor Healey pointed to work authorizations as a primary driver of the crisis.

Meanwhile, the 15 partner organizations which comprise the [Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative](#), in conjunction with the State, are doing their best to support these families. Yet unreasonable delays in the work authorization processes remain a huge financial and logistical barrier to any broader strategic solution - and a barrier which only the federal government and President Biden have the authority to address.

Currently nearly 5,600 families, comprising more than 20,000 individuals, reside in emergency assistance (EA) shelters, and that number grows daily. Systems that support newly arrived immigrants are at their breaking point with staff and resources stretched beyond capacity. The conditions, with some organizations working round the clock, are untenable and demand urgent attention with more creative, coordinated responses.

In addition to declaring a state of emergency and appealing to the Biden administration, Governor Healey also announced the establishment of the Massachusetts Migrant Families Relief Fund, administered by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and the Boston Foundation. This fund will rapidly deploy financial assistance, provide

socio-economic and cultural integration support, and provide operating funds to local community based organizations which provide direct services.

Among Steering Committee members of the Collaborative, Lenita Reason, executive director of the Brazilian Workers Center, and Dr. Geralde Gabeau, executive director of the Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI), both gave powerful remarks at the press conference Tuesday. Speaking to her first two months operating a state recognized Welcome Center, Reason expressed gratitude for the administration's support saying the work has been extremely trying but a blessing as well. *"Every day when we close our doors we know that the families who could be sleeping on the street or an emergency room have a bed, food, and a warm shower. That means a lot for us and I know it means a lot for them."*

Dr. Gabeau reminded attendees how it is our duty to stand behind the new arrivals' and their belief that by coming here, something in their lives will change for the better. She said, *"We must honor those who risk their lives to make it here. The least we can do is to do everything in our power to welcome them."* When interviewed later by the Boston Globe she further explained her personal position, *"People ask why I am so passionate about helping immigrants all the time? I explain why I call them my heroes. All of us, by coming together, can make our state the leader of what it means to be welcoming - welcoming with love, compassion, and dignity."*

Another steering committee partner of the Collaborative is Agencia ALPHA. Their Executive Director Patricia Sobalvarro was reflective in her comment, "The declaration highlights how this crisis is also having a big impact on many grassroots organizations and faith-based communities. They are providing front line relief to families in the form of food, clothing, shelter and have already been formally tapped to work with the State speaks to the fact that the State cannot do this work alone and how important it is to maintain open lines of communication."

Both Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll urged people, organizations, communities of faith, and others to get involved in this work. Information about volunteering, donating, and providing other assistance can be found at the new

website www.mass.gov/sheltercrisis, by emailing sheltercrisis@mass.gov, dialing 211, or going directly to Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative partners in the Boston area: [IFSI](#) or the [Brazilian Workers Center](#).