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LETTERS

The state's duty to shelter its residents

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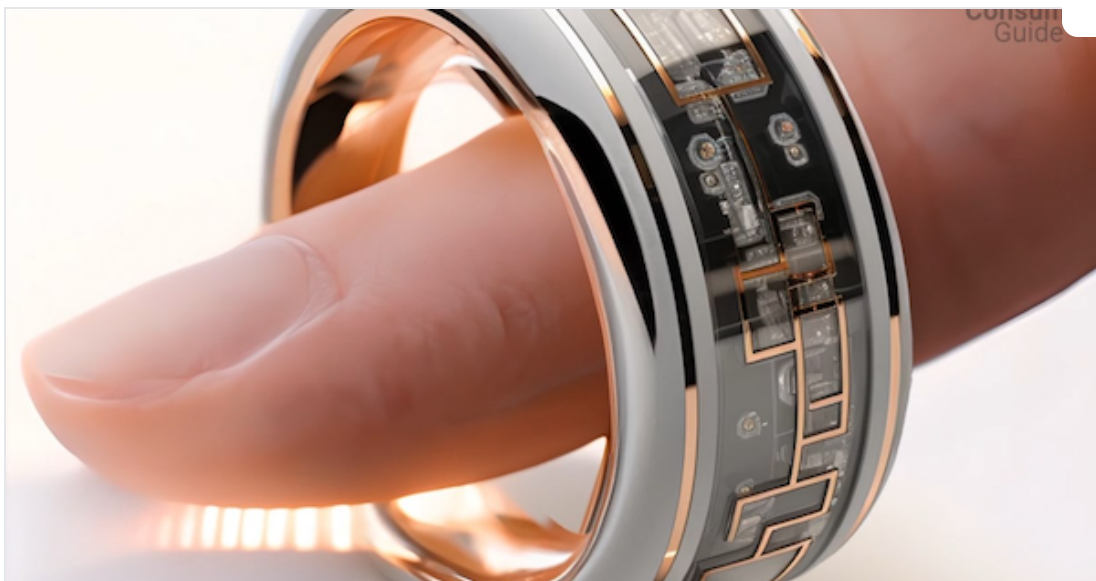


Haitian migrants Sergeline, her son Fritz, 17, and her baby Luna, 19 months, have been housed at a hotel in Boston, arriving from the Boston Medical Center temporary shelter in a waiting room there, May 2. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

We write concerning the right-to-shelter law described in the Aug. 8 article on the Emergency Assistance shelter system for families with children experiencing homelessness ([“Law guaranteeing shelter was promoted by Dukakis,”](#) Page A1). We agree that the shelter system is in crisis, but it is wrong to blame homeless families, including immigrants with children, for generating that crisis.

In reality, the Commonwealth has allowed the shelter system to fall into disarray and has often failed to meet its commitments to the most vulnerable members of our society. Simply put, policy makers need to recognize that the pressures on the shelter system arise because of a chronic shortage of affordable housing (particularly for the lowest-income families), lack of attention to eviction prevention for low-income tenants, and failure to prioritize income supports and housing subsidies that would allow homeless families to transition more quickly into permanent housing.

Greater Boston Legal Services recently resolved a class action case with the Commonwealth (*Garcia v. Department of Housing and Community Development*) to address substantial existing flaws in the shelter system. The settlement represents a binding commitment to not scapegoat the victims of a long history of failed housing policy in Massachusetts but rather to improve existing services to make them function properly.



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No one, especially homeless families, wants a system in which costly, long-term hotel stays substitute for safe and affordable housing. Instead, the Commonwealth must implement policies to prevent evictions in the first place, to increase the stock of

meaningfully affordable housing, and to provide supports to help families move out of the shelter system and into safe, permanent housing as quickly as possible.

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