

Migrants will no longer be allowed to sleep at Logan Airport, Healey administration says

By **Samantha J. Gross** Globe Staff, Updated June 28, 2024, 11:00 a.m.



Homeless migrants slept at Logan Airport in May. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The Healey administration said Friday that homeless and migrant families would no longer be allowed to sleep at Logan International Airport, its latest policy change intended to lessen the strain on state resources as the number of new arrivals continues to overwhelm the emergency shelter system.

The announcement, effective July 9, follows a trip by administration members to [five Texas towns near the US-Mexico border](#) to educate border officials and migrant families about “the lack of shelter availability in Massachusetts.”


For months, sleeping bags, air mattresses, and blankets have become a familiar sight in the international terminal [where families have been sleeping](#) while awaiting placement in a state-run emergency shelter.

In a statement, L. Scott Rice, the state’s emergency assistance director, said the administration’s decision is “in the best interest of families and travelers and staff at Logan, as the airport is not an appropriate place for people to seek shelter.”

“We are going to continue to spread the word that Massachusetts is out of shelter space and that, if families are traveling to Massachusetts, they need to be prepared with a plan for housing that does not include Logan Airport or our emergency assistance shelters,” he said.

The announcement angered housing advocates, who say that without swift action to tackle the state’s housing crisis, government officials are ignoring the root of the problem while leaving homeless families without a place to go.

ADVERTISING



Cardinal Health Steerable Knee Scooter w/...

Cy FSA store **FSA Store** - Sponsored

[Buy now](#)

Liz Alfred, an attorney with Greater Boston Legal Services who represents people in shelters, said the decision appears to be “driven by optics.” Alfred said she and other lawyers suggest the airport as a safe place for families to sleep while they wait for a shelter placement when there is no other option.

Terminal E at Logan has become an unofficial waypoint for weary families hoping for a spot in the shelter system.

“It does not feel like this is driven by what is best for families or how to address the housing crisis,” she said. “It seems like it is driven by how bad things look. . . . It’s a horrifying time right now.”

Andrea Park, a staff attorney and director of community-driven advocacy at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, said she is “very, very concerned.” She’s already heard from local communities across the state that they see families regularly sleeping outside or in their cars.

“There are a lot of open questions about where people are going to go, and if they are really going to be able to find a safe space for everyone,” she said. “It’s going to fall on

cities and towns who are going to see people coming there, looking for a safe place to sleep.”

Lenita Reason, executive director of the Brazilian Worker Center, said she agreed with the decision, which she hopes will help new arrivals better move through the system. Reason, whose organization gets money from the state to help connect new migrants with housing and resources, added that she was constantly in touch with local families who volunteer to host homeless ones.

“The airport is a public space, but it’s not a space for families and kids to stay for too long,” she said.

Eligible families at the airport who are on a waitlist for shelter placements will be offered places in overflow shelters, Healey’s office said Friday. Those include a new temporary shelter at a former prison in Norfolk that can accommodate up to 140 families. As of June 17, the most recent data available, there were 726 families on the waitlist for shelter placements.

According to Healey’s office, staff at Logan Airport will work with families to help them find transportation to a new location or where they have family or another option for a safe place to stay.

The new rule is not the first to bar homeless families from sheltering in public spaces in Massachusetts. Last summer, administrators at Boston Medical Center, which serves the neediest patients in the Boston area, barred families from sheltering in its emergency department, in some cases even sending them after-hours in Ubers to Logan Airport, [the Globe reported](#) at the time.

For decades, homeless families have been guaranteed shelter under [a 1980s-era law](#) in Massachusetts, [the only statewide right-to-shelter requirement](#) in the United States.

But as the housing crisis ramped up and economic and political unrest in Central and South American countries sent more migrants north, the system was overwhelmed.

Healey declared [a state of emergency](#) in August and, weeks later, said she would activate up to 250 [members of the National Guard](#) to help families living in some hotels access medical care, find transportation, or organize food deliveries.

In the fall, Healey [capped capacity](#) in state-run emergency shelters at 7,500 families — the first restriction on how many people the state would house in the system. And on May 1, state officials began to [limit stays in state-run overflow shelters to 30 days](#), requiring people to reapply monthly and show they are also seeking work authorization, pursuing new housing, or taking other steps to stay in the rapidly expanding program.

This spring, [the Legislature passed](#) a spending bill that gave the Healey administration the authority to kick out families who have lived in state-run emergency shelters for nine months or longer.

New York City, which has a similar shelter policy, imposes more stringent limits on how long newly arrived migrants may stay in emergency shelters. There, families with children are allowed to stay in shelters for a maximum of 60 days, though there are [efforts to repeal](#) that policy.

[Massachusetts' nine-month](#) requirement, which drew criticism from the advocacy community, was part of a broader spending bill meant to buoy the shelter system through the end of the fiscal year, and help fund it into 2025. The [90-day notices to exit](#) are expected to go out to 150 families in the shelter system as soon as July 1.

Nick Stoico of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

Samantha J. Gross can be reached at samantha.gross@globe.com. Follow her [@samanthajgross](#).

 [Show 183 comments](#)

©2024 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC