



City of Woburn Massachusetts

City Hall
10 Common Street
Woburn, MA 01801

Tel: 781-897-5901
www.cityofwoburn.com

Scott D. Galvin
Mayor

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RE: Woburn Migrant /Refugee Update

Approximately 1,000 migrant families have been entering the Commonwealth every month, resulting in Governor Healey's declaration of a state of emergency. Unless there are changes at the Federal and State level, this is an unsustainable crisis that will continue to challenge the Commonwealth, the City of Woburn, and other cities and towns required to share in the challenges of providing housing, education and other basic services for these migrant families.

Federal inaction on immigration reform has created, and worsened, a nationwide immigration crisis at the border, including the approval of asylum applications for migrant refugees to enter the United States, but with an irrational delay in the approval of their working papers for up to 18 months making migrants ineligible for employment. Immediate and meaningful bi-partisan immigration reform is needed now.

General Law Chapter 23B, §30, Emergency Housing Assistance Program, commonly referred to as the "right to shelter" law, requires the state Department of Housing and Community Development (recently renamed the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities) to provide emergency housing assistance for families with children and pregnant women, who are homeless. This law was well intentioned when approved in the 1980s to address homelessness. However, the purpose and intent of the right to shelter law when drafted and approved, was clearly not to accommodate the magnitude of homeless housing needs presented by this migrant crisis.

The Commonwealth is housing over 6,000 migrant families in hotels located in over 80 cities and towns across the state, including Woburn. Local approval is not required nor has the Commonwealth requested it. To date, five hotels have contracted directly with the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to provide housing for 155 migrant families, with 65 school aged children, and 75 children under the age of 5 at the cost of \$180.00 /day.

One of the hotels, which has agreed to house up to 110 families, is being managed by a non-profit housing entity responsible for serving as a liaison between the migrants, state agencies, the school department and the City. The other hotels will be staffed by National Guard members with similar responsibilities.

School aged children who are classified as homeless are entitled to an education under McKinney-Vento federal law, which defines homeless students as those lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and requires that school districts enroll such students immediately. Woburn Public Schools administration, staff and teachers have proactively risen to the challenge of enrolling and accommodating the school age children of these migrant families. Of the school age children, 10 are being educated at the WMHS, 16 at the middle schools, and 38 in the elementary schools.

The State will reimburse the City \$104/day for student educational expenses, equaling \$18,000.00 /year for each student. DESE will provide another \$1,000 for each enrolled student. Based on the newly enrolled migrant students, the City will be reimbursed \$1,235,000 for educational expenses. The impact on City services for Police and Fire is being monitored and at this time, is minimal.

A standing weekly meeting is held in my office with the Superintendent of Schools, the Police Chief, the Fire Chief, the Auditor, the Building Commissioner, the City Nurse and State officials to discuss ongoing issues and solutions to the challenges we are dealing with. Be assured that we are monitoring and reviewing all educational and costs incurred by the City on a monthly basis, and will demand and ensure that the Commonwealth reimburses the City for any expenses in excess of the reimbursements discussed above.

As Mayor, I also serve as the elected District 4 Representative for the Massachusetts Mayor's Association and I am a member of the MA Municipal Association Board of Directors, where I have been a strong advocate of the need for all communities to equitably share in the challenges presented by the recent surge in migrants into the Commonwealth, including the requirement to educate migrant children-notwithstanding McKinney-Vento.