



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
HOUSE AND SENATE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS  
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## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# GOP Lawmakers Outline Extensive Reforms to Address Migrant Crisis

*Leaders Jones and Tarr, GOP Caucus Unveil Comprehensive Plan for Communication, Accountability and Reform*

***Boston (01/14/25)*** – Citing ongoing concerns about the unsustainability of the migrant shelter system, as well as continuing issues with public safety, House and Senate Republicans, led by Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr (R-Gloucester) and House Minority Leader Brad Jones (R-No. Reading), unveiled a multi-faceted plan with administrative and legislative components to address the migrant crisis today at the State House.

Citing the report released by the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Tarr emphasized the current spending on shelter systems is unsustainable. He also pointed to thousands of pages of Serious Incident Reports, that document specific incidents regarding public safety.

“Massachusetts faces a complex and ongoing challenge in addressing the migrant crisis, but we cannot allow this challenge to compromise the safety, well-being, and financial stability of our communities and our Commonwealth,” said Tarr. “These reforms are not just necessary—they are urgent. We must ensure that our resources are being used wisely and that every person involved, from migrants to Massachusetts residents, is treated with fairness.”

“The emergency shelter system in Massachusetts clearly needs a complete overhaul,” said Jones. “In my opinion, the four guiding principles we need to focus on are ensuring transparency, accountability, public safety and fiscal responsibility. The reforms House and Senate Republicans are offering will help to right the ship and make the program more sustainable, efficient and effective moving forward, and I hope our Democratic colleagues will join us in embracing these proposed changes.”

The legislators are urging the Healey-Driscoll administration and their legislative colleagues to take immediate action on both administrative and legislative fronts, including:

### **Administrative and Procedural Actions**

- **Monthly Legislative Briefings:** Establish regular, transparent briefings to provide updates on the migrant crisis response and its impact on the state.
- **Monthly Cost Accounting:** Require a detailed, monthly accounting of all expenditures related to the migrant

crisis to ensure full transparency.

- **Sustainability Plan from Governor’s Administration:** Develop a plan to scale down the emergency shelter program and transition to a more sustainable model as the crisis evolves.
- **Comprehensive Audit of the Migrant Shelter System by the Auditor:** Conduct a thorough audit of all costs associated with the state’s response to the migrant crisis to ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability.

## Legislative Actions

- **Amend the Right to Shelter Law:** Modify the Right to Shelter law to require individuals seeking shelter to demonstrate lawful presence in Massachusetts for at least one year, excluding victims of domestic violence and those displaced by natural disasters.
- **Limit Shelter Stays:** Implement a six-month limit on shelter stays to ensure fair access to resources and encourage individuals to transition to longer-term solutions.
- **Prevent Violent Actors from Re-entering the Shelter System:** Establish clear protocols to prevent individuals who have engaged in violent behavior from re-entering the shelter system.
- **Honor ICE Detainers for Violent Offenders:** Allow law enforcement and the courts to honor ICE detainers for individuals with violent criminal backgrounds, ensuring the safety of all residents.
- **Competitive Bidding for Crisis Response Contracts:** Require a competitive bidding process for all elements of the migrant crisis response, promoting fairness and efficiency in the allocation of state funds.
- **Creation of Officer of Inspector General (OIG) Unit:** Establish an OIG unit specifically tasked with overseeing the migrant crisis response to ensure accountability, transparency and adherence to state laws.

The proposed reforms are designed to address both short-term and long-term challenges, ensuring that resources are used effectively and the safety and well-being of both residents and migrants are protected.

The legislation will be filed by end of day Friday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025 via an omnibus bill, as well as filed individually, with Republican legislators urging swift action to address the ongoing crisis and its far-reaching effects on Massachusetts communities.

## Additional Quotes from Members of the Senate Republican Caucus:

“It’s been clear for years that our right to shelter law is unsustainable,” said **State Senator Ryan Fattman (R-Sutton)**. “Yet, at every turn, Governor Healey has sought more and more taxpayer funding for the program, running up a tab of billions (that we know of). We’re seeing violent criminals, drug traffickers, and rapists being housed in our state shelters because the administration failed to complete background checks. If Governor Healey wants another penny for this program, we demand reform, accountability, and more communication now. Costs are up. Crime is up. Time is up.”

“The current shelter system is broken. If we’re going to actually address this crisis, we must do so with a more pragmatic approach so that state resources can effectively be used to help Massachusetts residents in need of support. The system needs stringent oversight, a vetting process, and to root out bad actors who are exhausting the Commonwealth of resources while engaging in illegal activities,” said **State Senator Patrick O’Connor (R-Weymouth)**. “There is a way to make to ensure that the integrity of our shelters is protected while keeping public safety a top priority. Going forward, addressing the migrant and shelter crisis requires reevaluation and taking a more balanced, practical approach to make certain that we can continue to offer support to those who need it most while maintaining order and accountability. The reforms offered today will go a long way in creating a better system that reflects our values in Massachusetts and providing real tangible assistance to those most in need in our communities.”

“For 2 years we have been predicting that these costs would reach \$5 billion, which I think is a conservative estimate,

and to what end? What does this accomplish?" **State Senator Peter Durant (R-Spencer)**, said. "Every legislative and procedural action discussed today needs to be undertaken as soon as possible in order to bring this situation under control." "We have been told background checks were being conducted and now we learn that is not the case. Meanwhile, we are harboring criminals inside facilities where women and children are being sheltered and when we become aware of that, we shuffle those criminals to other shelters. It's the wrong thing to do," **Durant** said.

"While we recognize the importance of supporting those in need, it is clear that our shelter system is severely strained and urgently requires reform to remain functional and safe for all residents," said **State Senator Kelly Dooner (R-Taunton)**. "The administration must be held accountable for the more than \$1 billion already spent on this crisis, as costs continue to escalate. Public safety must be prioritized, and the people of Massachusetts deserve the support and assistance they need during this critical time. We call on our colleagues in the legislature to take immediate action and collaborate on these critical reforms."

### **Additional Quotes from Members of the House Republican Caucus:**

**State Representative Paul K. Frost (R-Auburn)**, who served on the special emergency shelter commission last year, said, "Massachusetts has acted as a magnet for newly arrived migrants because we are the only state in the nation that has a statewide Right to Shelter Law, and this encourages groups and charities at the U.S. southern border to send them here. This has resulted in many long-term Massachusetts residents having to compete for these shelter services with those who've only been in the state for a few hours. House and Senate Republicans are offering common sense reforms to improve the state's shelter program, which will protect these services for Massachusetts residents as the law was originally intended."

"The ongoing migrant crisis is a pressing financial and public safety risk for the Commonwealth, and it is vitally important that the Legislature take steps immediately to start fixing the situation," **State Representative Steve Xiarhos (R-Barnstable)** said. "The hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on migrant housing and support, contrary to the original intent of the 'Right to Shelter Law,' is offensive to Massachusetts residents and, especially, taxpayers. I find it unbelievable that our state still fails and refuses to properly check the background of aid recipients to weed out potentially-dangerous violent criminals, rapists, and drug dealers. Our state needs to abandon its sanctuary policies immediately and start sharing data with federal law enforcement. I appreciate the attention Republican legislative leadership, and my colleagues are placing on this important issue."

"Today's plan to address the emergency shelter crisis marks a crucial step forward," said **State Representative Michael Chaisson (R-Foxborough)**. "The current direction under this administration is not sustainable, and I'm pleased to see the House and Senate Republican caucuses working together. This press conference highlights our unified commitment to advancing policies that serve the best interests of our constituents and strengthen our state. I look forward to the Governor's reexamination of the intent behind the emergency shelter laws."

"Our right to shelter law was never intended to be utilized by non-residents and the lack of accountability for and lack of transparency into the emergency shelter system needs to cease," said **State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury)**. "The Legislature needs to have accurate and timely insight into the full cost of our emergency shelter system, and we need to have a broader understanding of the fiscal implications to state and local governments. Our priority as a Legislature should be reforming the right to shelter law and improving the public safety for people in our emergency shelter system and communities, including passing a law that would allow law enforcement and courts to work with ICE to protect residents from violent offenders."

"I am proud to stand with the Republican caucus who have put forth a comprehensive yet common sense plan to take steps towards addressing the unsustainable migrant shelter situation that is costing Massachusetts taxpayers billions, depleting services from Massachusetts citizens, and worst of all appears mismanaged and directionless putting Massachusetts residents in danger," said **State Representative Joseph D. McKenna (R-Webster)**. "I appreciate Minority Leaders Tarr and Jones for their staunch and thoughtful leadership on this issue, demanding accountability and putting Massachusetts residents first."

"There is a glaring lack of transparency in the state's shelter program, as well as an abundantly clear lack of accountability," said **State Representative David K. Muradian, Jr. (R-Grafton)**. "For over a year, members of the

Republican caucus have been pushing for much-needed reforms. It's time that we place a priority on the residents of Massachusetts who are in need of services."

"Today was the first step towards holding this administration accountable for all the failures that have occurred over the past year and a half, that even she admits are happening with sheltering these people," said **State Representative Michael J. Soter (R-Bellingham)**. "Today both the House and Senate Republican Caucuses outlined a clear plan to promote more transparency and a path forward to fixing the right to shelter. It is time to hold this administration accountable with these policies that will help stop the influx and pressure that the immigration crisis is putting on this state."

"I want to thank Senate Minority Leader Tarr and House Minority Leader Jones for their leadership on this very important issue," said **State Representative Alyson Sullivan Almeida (R-Abington)**. "It is time we put the residents of Massachusetts first, we can do that by swiftly making a change to the right to shelter law to include a residence requirement. We also need to do better at protecting our communities, especially those living in state run shelters, from violent offenders with ICE detainees. Giving the authority to law enforcement and judges to honor an ICE detainer of violent offenders would be the necessary step in protecting our Commonwealth from violent offenders. "

"Today's joint effort with House and Senate Republicans highlights the importance of collaboration in addressing the challenges surrounding migrant and shelter issues in the Commonwealth," said **State Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren)**. "Change is long overdue, and it is essential that we prioritize the safety and well-being of our communities, while also ensuring that resources are allocated responsibly. The current system is broken and unsustainable. Reform is long overdue."

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