

Gov. Pritzker Announces Plan to Improve Asylum Seeker Emergency Response

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New data-driven state investments will provide shelter to those at police stations and airports, speed transition to independent living

CHICAGO — Governor JB Pritzker announced today that the State will invest an additional \$160 million via the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis presented by the arrival of over 24,000 asylum seekers from the U.S. Southern Border.

The State, alongside our local partners, has led a comprehensive data driven analysis of the ongoing asylum seeker response, rooted in not only data but also input from frontline partners and new arrivals, which identified several “bottlenecks” where services and resettlement tended to slow. These bottlenecks included delays in initial intake at landing sites, access to shelter, and the transition to independent living. This has led to backlogs and capacity issues, most visible in individuals sleeping outside police stations, but more broadly across the process.

THE PLAN

The State is deploying targeted additional funding through a data-driven approach that will address these bottlenecks in all stages of the current asylum seeker response. This includes:

1. **WELCOME:** \$30 million to stand up a large intake center to centrally welcome and comprehensively coordinate new arrivals, prioritizing onward movement. This investment will ensure both a more integrated approach across state, county, city, and community-based organizations but will also ensure better support for those coming to Chicago who are seeking another final destination, or who have sponsors in Illinois and don’t require shelter, thereby better maintaining shelter capacity as a whole. With this approach, data indicates the number of new arrivals requiring shelter can be reduced by 10%.

More immediately, in partnership with the City of Chicago, the State has funded a New Life Centers of Chicagoland team to deploy to the City bus landing zone to ensure every new arrival is supported in a choice to seek alternative arrangements outside the City shelter system.

1. **SHELTER:** \$65 million to help the City of Chicago launch a winterized soft shelter site providing temporary housing for up to 2,000 people at any given time for six months. These beds will be prioritized for families and individuals with disabilities currently sleeping outdoors, on police station floors, and at the airport. This will ensure a safe and warm place to live during the winter months and allow for the provision of the wraparound services the State currently funds at City shelters. This site will operate as part of the existing City of Chicago shelter system.

1. **INDEPENDENCE:** \$65 million in increased funding to expand the wraparound services the State currently provides at City shelters which enable new arrivals to live independently as they await asylum hearings, including case management, legal services, work permit processing, and workforce development support. The State will continue to provide the rental assistance that allows asylum seekers to transition from shelters to independent living.

This announcement builds on \$478 million in state funding that has been provided or committed to the asylum seeker response over FY 2023 and 2024. This includes direct funding to the City of Chicago and other municipalities assisting asylum seekers as well as substantial State funding for shelter, food, medical care, rental assistance, and wraparound casework and services.

“With Congress likely unwilling to act, and with lives of innocent people at stake, the hurdles we face seem far beyond the scope of any one state – and yet, everything we can do, we must do,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “Today I am laying out a comprehensive data-driven plan to improve the response to this humanitarian crisis and amplify the effectiveness of our investments with the end goal of moving asylum seekers out of our system of care and on to independence.”

A cornerstone of this plan is a State-led effort to move thousands of individuals through the federal Temporary Protect Status (TPS) and Employment Authorization Document (EAD) processes as quickly as possible. This will allow asylum seekers to gain employment and achieve self-sufficiency, thereby alleviating the strain on state resources. In the weeks and months ahead, the State will stand-up large-scale workshops with legal aid providers and pro-bono attorneys to facilitate the application process. Workshops will be co-located with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) workforce programming to provide federal assistance and job search resources simultaneously. By February, the State aims to have submitted the applications of the roughly 11,000 TPS and/or EAD eligible asylum seekers residing in City of Chicago shelters, with thousands more to be completed in the months that follow.

POLICY CHANGES

To further address bottlenecks, the City and State are pairing these new investments with changes to existing policy to ensure as many people as possible receive services. The City has announced policy changes related to shelter stay duration for all asylum seekers in city shelters, which will be paired with intensified case management and

housing assistance from the State. This will ensure individuals get the services they need while also quickly connecting to community and transitioning to independent living, which then opens space for additional new arrivals requiring immediate shelter.

The State is also adjusting its Asylum Seeker Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ASERAP) to extend its reach to support onward movement. The program will now cover three-months of rent, instead of up to six-months, which will allow all current shelter residents to access the program. For all new shelter arrivals, ASERAP will no longer be available, but housing assistance will still be provided to support the housing search process, tenant rights, and landlord-tenant communications.

FEDERAL SUPPORT

Governor Pritzker has repeatedly urged federal intervention to aid in managing the ongoing humanitarian crisis, which has been exacerbated by GOP governors sending buses of migrants to Democrat-run cities, often without any information or warning to human services agencies in Illinois. Only the federal government and U.S. Congress can provide the coordination and funding needed to truly address this crisis. However, with the approaching Midwestern winter and continued influx of asylum seekers, the City and State are committed to taking the necessary action to keep people safe.

In early October, Governor Pritzker sent a letter to President Biden requesting significant expansion in federal government support, including coordination efforts at the border, funding, data collection, fee waivers, and Medicaid and housing vouchers. In response, the Biden administration has taken steps to accelerate the work authorization process for new arrivals. The Governor continues to be in constant contact with the White House to discuss ongoing needs for coordination and support.

“The collaboration between city and state agencies during this humanitarian crisis is an example of how when we work together, we can have a greater impact,” **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton.** “As our new neighbors continue to arrive in Chicago and areas across Illinois, we want to ensure they are safe, treated with dignity, and have access to the resources they need to care for themselves and their families.”

“IDHS remains committed to supporting asylum-seeking children, families and individuals during this humanitarian crisis. As a welcoming state, we offer a variety of services to refugees and those experiencing homelessness,” **said Dulce Quintero, Secretary of IDHS.** “Through Governor Pritzker’s leadership and these new investments, wraparound services will be bolstered – ensuring more new arrivals are empowered to find avenues to self-sufficiency.”

“This new strategic plan combined with these investments from the State will better help the web of service providers, shelters, NGOs, and nonprofits provide support to asylum seekers in need,” **said Matt DeMateo, Executive Director at New Life Centers of Chicagoland.** “I thank Governor Pritzker and his administration for the ongoing commitment to ensuring we approach this humanitarian crisis with compassion and care for all. These changes mean enhanced wraparound services and living conditions as we continue the work to empower asylum seekers who wish to contribute to our communities and create self-sufficient lives for themselves and their families.”