

Funding for Massachusetts emergency shelter system drying up, lacks long-term solutions

As the state of Massachusetts grapples with a surge in illegal immigration and homeless families seeking shelter, the economic implications are becoming increasingly clear. Governor Maura Healey's administration has requested additional funding to address the over-capacity emergency shelter system, which is set to run out of money this spring. The current situation highlights the strain on resources and the need for long-term solutions.

House budget chief Rep. Aaron Michlewitz told WGBH News in November, "We face some hard decisions and choices ahead for 2024 and beyond."

Shelter Funding and Costs

Governor Healey's supplemental budget request includes draining the remainder of the state Transitional Escrow Fund balance of \$863 million to cover shelter caseloads, school district costs, case management, and health and community services for fiscal years 2024 and 2025. The initial \$325 million allocated for shelter costs in the state budget ran out this month, necessitating the request for additional funding.

The state has spent \$395 million on emergency assistance costs in fiscal 2024, exceeding the original allocation by \$70 million. This leaves about \$180 million left until the state has spent the now \$575 million budgeted for shelters this fiscal year. Each report shows that they spend around \$40 million every two weeks, indicating a significant ongoing

expense.

Housing Arrangements and Costs

Massachusetts is housing thousands of migrant families in hotels and motels, with 17 contracts for housing totaling more than \$116 million for fiscal year 2024. Originally reported by WBZ News, these contracts, which end in June, include provisions for three meals a day, costing \$16 for breakfast, \$17 for lunch, and \$31 for dinner, totaling \$64 per day per person.

Additionally, the state has awarded a \$10 million six-month no-bid contract to Spinelli Ravioli Manufacturing Company to provide and deliver meals. The company states that it was contacted at the onset of the crisis but does not have a guaranteed contract beyond this initial emergency period.

Challenges and Solutions

The surge in demand for emergency shelter has overwhelmed the state's capacity, leading to concerns about the long-term sustainability of the current system. Governor Healey's proposed \$873 million supplemental budget aims to address the current shelter shortfall and provide for the projected cost of emergency assistance in 2025.

However, concerns remain about the state's ability to sustain these costs without additional federal assistance. The state is coming up short \$224 million for fiscal year 2024 and faces a \$590 million budget gap in fiscal year 2025. Governor Healey's budget includes using one-time pandemic relief funds to cover the deficiency for fiscal year 2024 and half of the expected costs for fiscal year 2025.

Conclusion

The economic impact of housing migrants in Massachusetts is significant and requires a multi-faceted approach to address the immediate needs of families while also implementing long-term solutions. Governor Healey's administration is seeking

additional funding to support the overburdened emergency shelter system, but the state faces challenges in sustaining these costs without additional federal assistance.

Many residents are expressing frustration and concern over the mounting costs and logistical challenges associated with housing arrangements, signaling a contentious issue that will likely feature prominently in political debates and decision-making processes across America as we enter a highly anticipated presidential election.

Massachusetts Air Force Member dies after setting himself on fire in protest to war in Gaza

Aaron Bushnell, a 25-year-old Massachusetts native, tragically died in the hospital after setting himself on fire outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., in protest against Israel's war in Gaza. Bushnell, who grew up and went to school in Massachusetts, was an active duty member of the U.S. Air Force based in San Antonio, Texas.

The incident occurred on Sunday, with Bushnell livestreaming his self-immolation on the social media platform Twitch. In the video, he expressed his refusal to be complicit in what he described as "genocide," and shouted "Free Palestine!" as he burned in front of the embassy.

Local authorities responded to reports of an individual experiencing a possible medical or mental health emergency.

Bushnell was pronounced dead at 8:06 p.m. ET Sunday, having sustained critical injuries. The Israeli Embassy confirmed that none of its staff were injured in the incident.

Bushnell had been on active duty since May 2020, serving as a cyber defense operations specialist with the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron at Joint Base San Antonio. He was known for his volunteer work with the San Antonio Care Collective, where he supported the city's unhoused population by providing blankets, sweaters, and snacks.

In the days before his death, Bushnell created a will detailing his final wishes, including arrangements for his cat, which he designated to his neighbor. Lupe Barboza of the Care Collective, who saw the will, described Bushnell as someone who was measured and knew what he was doing.

The incident is currently under investigation by local police, the Secret Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The U.S. Air Force has stated that it will provide more information after notifying Bushnell's next of kin.

Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder expressed condolences to Bushnell's family, calling the event a tragic event. Air Force Col. Celina Noyes, the 70th ISRW commander, also extended sympathies to Bushnell's family and friends.

The war in Gaza, which sparked Bushnell's protest, has resulted in significant casualties and displacement. According to the health ministry in Gaza, over 29,000 people have been killed, and nearly 2 million have been displaced, with over 60% of housing damaged.

BREAKING: Shooting in New Bedford leaves one man hospitalized

New Bedford, MA – The New Bedford Police Department responded to a shooting incident this evening, February 26th, at approximately 6:00 PM in the area of Austin St. and Cedar St. The response was prompted by a ShotSpotter activation, indicating the discharge of a firearm.

Shortly after the incident, an adult male victim arrived at the hospital with a non-life-threatening injury. The New Bedford Police Department has not released further details about the victim's identity or the specific nature of the injuries.

The investigation into the shooting is ongoing and remains very active at this time. To report any relevant details, please contact the New Bedford Police Department.

This is an active investigation and we will update this story when new information is released. Carlos Felix was at the scene of the shooting:

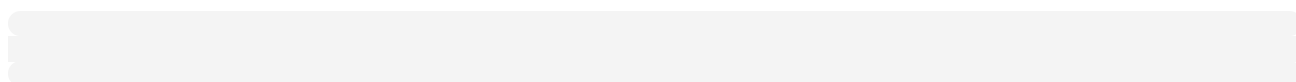
Photo captures sad “Rise and Fall” of Taunton’s “Silver

City Galleria” 32 years after grand opening

A recent drone photograph of the vacant land where the Silver City Galleria Mall once stood in Taunton, Massachusetts, has sparked a wave of nostalgia among residents. The image, taken from above by the aerial photography page “Aerial New England”, contrasts sharply with a photograph captured on March 1st, 1992, the day the mall first opened, when the entire parking lot was bustling with cars and eager shoppers.



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A post shared by New Bedford Guide (@newbedfordguide)

The Silver City Galleria Mall, a beloved landmark that once symbolized the heart of retail and community spirit, has since closed its doors, and the once-vibrant building has been reduced to rubble. However, the site is not destined to remain empty. In July 2022, the Taunton Planning Board approved a site plan for a major redevelopment project at the former mall location.

The plan originally included the construction of a FedEx distribution center, but FedEx has since reevaluated it due to financial factors.

In January 2024, Portman Industrial secured \$29 million for the first phase of Silver City Business Park, a 1.1-million-square-foot industrial park at the former Silver City Galleria Mall site in Taunton, MA. The site was purchased in 2021 for \$75 million, and phase one will include a 248,435-square-foot building with modern amenities. The park will eventually feature four warehouses of varying sizes, with the three larger ones reaching 55 feet in height.

As construction progresses and the landscape changes, the drone photograph serves as a poignant reminder of the mall's past glory days and a bittersweet glimpse into its future. The redevelopment of the former Silver City Galleria Mall site represents not just a physical transformation but also a nostalgic journey through cherished memories of days gone by.

Massachusetts 2024 ballot questions: MCAS repeal, minimum wage increase, psychedelic regulation

As the 2024 election approaches, Massachusetts residents may have the opportunity to vote on several important ballot questions that could impact education, labor policies, government accountability, and public health. Here's a closer look at each of the potential initiatives:

Repeal Passing Assessment Requirement for High School Graduation Initiative: This initiative aims to repeal the requirement that students must achieve a certain competency level on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam to graduate high school. Supporters argue that the MCAS exam is an unfair measure of student achievement and that graduation requirements should be more flexible. Opponents, however, raise concerns about the potential impact on educational standards and accountability.

Minimum Wage for Tipped Employees Initiative: This proposal seeks to gradually increase the wage of tipped employees until it meets the state minimum wage in 2029. It would also still permit tipping in addition to the minimum wage. Supporters argue that this would ensure fair wages for tipped workers, while opponents raise concerns about the potential impact on businesses, particularly small businesses in the hospitality industry.

App-Based Drivers as Contractors and Labor Policies Initiative: This initiative considers app-based drivers to be

independent contractors and enacts several labor policies related to app-based companies. The specifics of the labor policies are not provided, but this initiative could have significant implications for the gig economy and the rights of app-based workers.

Authorization of State Auditor to Audit General Court Initiative: This initiative would authorize the state auditor to audit the state legislature, known as the General Court. It would also remove some existing regulations regarding the auditing process. Supporters argue that this would increase government transparency and accountability, while opponents raise concerns about potential conflicts of interest and the need for legislative independence.

Unionization and Collective Bargaining for Transportation Network Drivers Initiative: This proposal would provide for unionizing and collective bargaining for transportation network drivers, such as those working for companies like Uber and Lyft. Supporters argue that this would give drivers a stronger voice and improve their working conditions, while opponents raise concerns about the potential impact on the app-based economy and consumer prices.

Regulated Access to Psychedelic Substances Initiative: This initiative seeks to regulate access to psychedelic substances, such as psilocybin (found in magic mushrooms) and MDMA (commonly known as ecstasy). The specifics of the regulations are not provided, but supporters argue that these substances have therapeutic potential and should be regulated for safe use, while opponents raise concerns about potential abuse and public health risks.

These potential ballot questions represent a range of important issues that could shape the future of Massachusetts. Whether they ultimately make it onto the ballot and how voters will respond remain to be seen, but they are sure to spark lively debate and discussion in the lead-up to the 2024

election.

Providence's Washington Bridge Update: traffic pattern changes are coming

The Washington Bridge in Providence, Rhode Island, has been a focal point of transportation concerns following the closure of its westbound side due to significant structural issues. To address congestion, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) has announced plans to update the traffic pattern over the coming months.

RIDOT Director Peter Alviti outlined the plans, which include adding a third travel lane in both directions. Currently, there are two eastbound lanes and two westbound lanes, all on the eastbound side of the bridge, which is a newer structure.

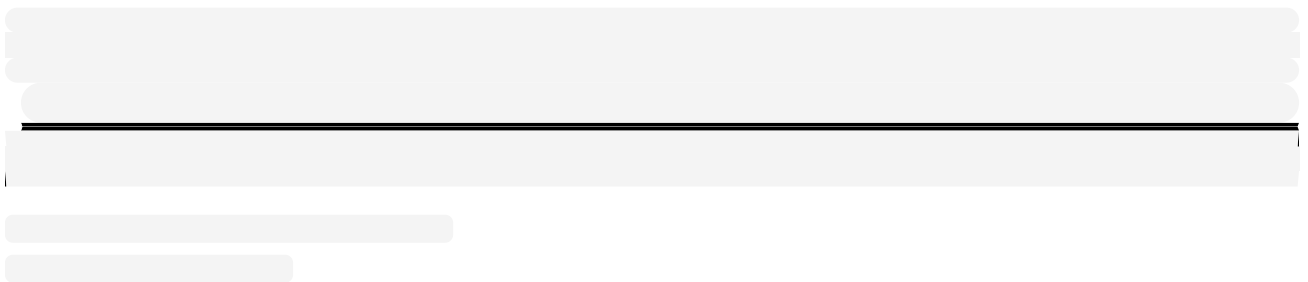
The closure of the westbound side on Dec. 11 caused substantial traffic backups on I-195 between Providence and East Providence, as well as in surrounding neighborhoods used as detours. The new traffic pattern, scheduled to begin on Feb. 26, will involve reducing two travel lanes on each side to 10 feet wide, exclusively for passenger vehicles. Trucks will be restricted to the right lane, which will be 11 feet wide.

Additionally, the speed limit will be reduced to 40 miles per hour in both directions. Westbound vehicles will cross over to the eastbound side of the highway about 3,000 feet sooner, and vehicles merging onto I-195 East from South Water Street/India Street will have to yield.

To address potential traffic incidents, tow trucks and Rhode Island State Police troopers will be stationed in the area at all times for quick response. However, inclement weather and supply chain issues could impact the projected eight-week completion timeframe for these changes.



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Massachusetts taxpayers foot cost of \$64/day per migrant, crisis to cost \$1 billion in 2024

Recent revelations about the cost of housing migrants in Massachusetts have sparked controversy and become a focal point in the state's political landscape, with implications for the upcoming 2024 presidential election. A recent investigation by CBS News has uncovered that Massachusetts is spending an average of \$64 a day to house migrants, with vendors charging exorbitant rates for meals.

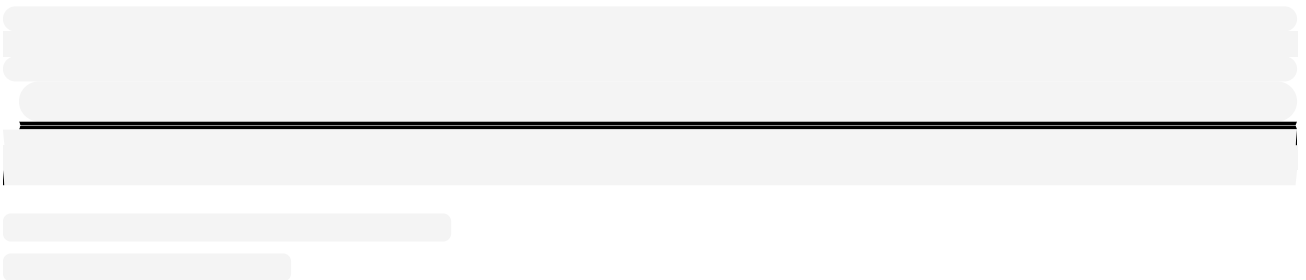
According to the CBS News report, vendors are charging \$16 for breakfast, \$17 for lunch, and \$31 for dinner per day for each migrant they feed. The total cost to Massachusetts taxpayers for migrant housing this year is expected to be around \$1 billion, a staggering figure that has raised eyebrows and ignited debate.

The controversy over high costs of migrant housing has been compounded by Governor Maura Healey's decision to close down a recreational center in Roxbury, MA, to house migrants. This move has sparked outrage among residents and community leaders, who argue that the closure has deprived the local community of vital services.





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Governor Healey has been urging residents to house migrants for months, and now some are beginning to do so, sparking significant controversy. This grassroots effort has been highly criticized across the United States, but a few residents have begun opening up their homes to provide shelter to migrants in need.





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The issue of migrant housing and the associated costs is expected to be a major topic in the 2024 presidential election, with candidates likely to weigh in on how best to address the challenges facing Massachusetts and other states grappling with similar issues. As the debate rages on, one thing is clear: the cost of housing migrants is not just a financial burden but also a deeply divisive and contentious issue that will shape the political landscape for years to

come.

Elizabeth Warren takes first potshot at 2024 Massachusetts challenger John Deaton

Election season is officially kicking off in the state of Massachusetts as Senator Elizabeth Warren is now facing competition on the 2024 ballot. John Deaton, who is newly a Swansea, Massachusetts resident has threw his hat in the race and began his campaign running as a republican.

Deaton is most definitely the underdog as Elizabeth Warren is a household name across the country, and of course, Massachusetts is an extremely liberal state.

With that being said, he still has a serious chance of winning this race and Elizabeth Warren knows this. The day John Deaton announced his campagin, Elizabeth Warren was ready to take her first shot on Twitter at her new opponent.

Will you donate to my re-election campaign so we can protect our Senate majority? <https://t.co/lRvfFpbnbr>

– Elizabeth Warren (@ewarren) February 20, 2024

Warren was quick to categorize Deaton as a “MAGA Republican” which will likely be a theme in campaigns across the country. Deaton responded to this claim and listed a few of his talking points he will most likely be campaigning on.

Senator, no one recruited me and I’m looking forward to a

substantive discussion on the issues that are important to the good people of Massachusetts, like income inequality, inflation, housing costs, illegal immigration, the debt crisis, and veterans' services. <https://t.co/uYD7iZxf8J>

– John E Deaton (@JohnEDeaton1) February 21, 2024

The migrant crisis and housing crisis will likely be major talking points in Massachusetts this election as both are huge areas of concern for residents across the state. Competition in politics is good for citizens and hopefully this race will open up deeper dialogue on the issues that we are currently facing in this state.

Massachusetts High School girls basketball team forfeits after biological male injures 3 players

Social media is buzzing with controversy after a biological male playing on a girls basketball team in Massachusetts injured multiple girls on the opposing team. The Collegiate Charter School of Lowell girls basketball team quit after 16 minutes of play with KIPP Academy leading 31-14 at half time.

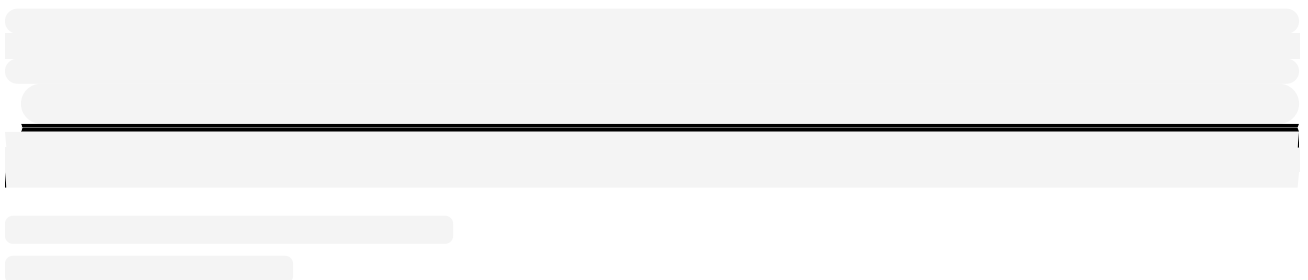
Once this story received national attention, the Collegiate Charter School of Lowell released a statement on the situation. In the press release they noted that they “support this decision and reiterates its values of both inclusivity and safety for all students.”

They also stated, “We take the standards set by the MIAA and our Board of Trustees seriously and strive to uphold them on and off the court. We also follow the guidance from the MIAA and state laws regarding equity and access for all student-athletes.”

A video went viral showing one of the injuries involving the biological male during the game.



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New Bedford Police reunite iPad with autistic child whose device was allegedly stolen by FedEx driver

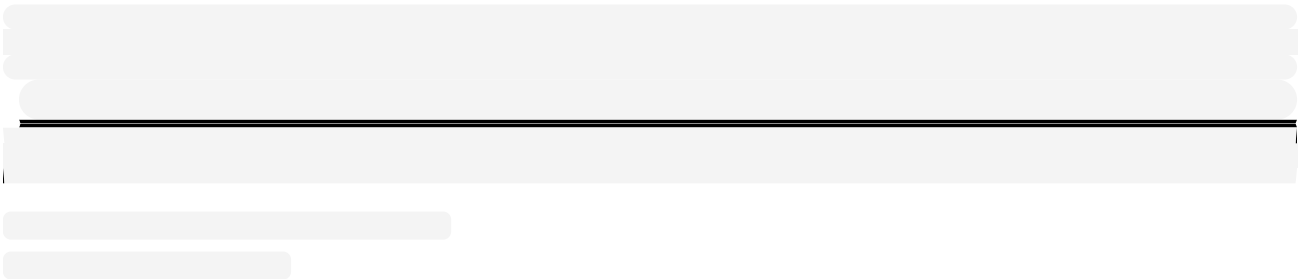
“A New Bedford boy has been reunited with his iPad after a delivery driver was caught on camera and suspected of stealing it.

“He was getting ready to go to school, he was playing with his tablet outside...then she [mom] put him on the school bus and at some point, forgot the tablet on the bench,” said Nicanor, Gabriel’s father.

Edith and Nicanor’s son, Gabriel, has autism, and uses his iPad as a tool to communicate. Last Thursday, Gabriel forgot his iPad outside of his house on the way to school. Luckily, video footage captured exactly what had happened to it. Surveillance cameras captured a delivery driver leaving a package on their porch before taking notice of the iPad, which had been left on a bench. The driver is seen walking back to his truck before turning back to go to the house where he then appears to hide the iPad behind a tree planter. The driver then moves his truck down the street but is seen just four minutes later walking back towards the house. He can then be seen removing the iPad off of the porch before leaving the area.



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“At first we didn’t know know what to do exactly, we started asking our neighbors, our neighbors gave us the footage of the driver putting the tablet on the floor and taking it,” said Nicanor.

And when Gabriel’s iPad was stolen, it caused a huge riff in

his everyday life and routine.

Nicanor and Edith added, "He spent all night almost crying, he tried to calm down with something else but its hard for him to engage. He do a little play [on the iPad] but it's more for communication purposes because he's autistic, he's 6 years old, and thats the way he can engage in communication with people."

The couple decided to file a report with the NBPD that day, but they never expected for this to happen.

"the officer took my report and they told me, 'oh were gonna get your tablet back,' and it wasnt until 11:45 p.m. when they just came home with the tablet," said Nicanor.

And how did they find it?



New Bedford Police Department photo.

"My partner, Ofc. Pereira, he ended up being able to make an inquiry, and we go to that address, and lo and behold it's there, and we're excited 'cus we found it, and we bring it

over to the couple...and I doubt they were ever expecting to ever get that tablet back," said Ofc. Sarah Fine.

Ofc. Fine has only been with the department for only two weeks, and is already grateful and humbled by her experience.

"To see that joy, to give something back to someone they never thought they'd see again, especially the fact that it was so important to their child, and that was an absolute tool for them – to see them that happy – that brings joy to me," added Ofc. Fine.

"I appreciate all the effort that New Bedford Police did for me, for my kid actually, I have so much gratitude for what they did," said Nicanor.

Officers have requested a charge to be filed for larceny against the driver out of New Bedford District Court."-New Bedford Police Department.