

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is “Right to Shelter?”

Massachusetts has a “right to shelter” law, meaning families have a legal right to shelter that the Commonwealth must comply with. This is the result of a 1983 state law.

Why is an emergency family shelter necessary?

There is a critical shortage of shelter beds in Massachusetts, which has been experiencing record numbers of entries into the system. Coupled with low exits, this has led to a critical shortage.

How has the State been in communication with Town Officials?

The Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities recently contacted the Town of Norwood to inform officials that the State has reserved rooms to begin providing unhoused families with shelter several weeks ago and the Depar. Previously, towns were sometimes only given 72 hours notice.

How many families will be sheltered in Norwood?

The State is planning to place approximately 63 families in late January. There are an additional dozen families that have been housed by the state at a separate hotel in Norwood that are being “consolidated” into this one site.

Why is the state consolidating shelters?

It is our understanding that the state wants to move to fewer shelter sites overall and to have all sites “managed”. Currently the state has some shelters that are as few as 8 or 10 rooms.

Who will be staying at the shelter?

Only families with children and/or pregnant women are eligible for placement in State emergency shelters. Families without a safe place to stay may be deemed eligible if they meet the following criteria:

- Be a resident of Massachusetts, and be living in the United States with the knowledge and consent of the Department of Homeland Security;
- Meet the gross income standards and asset test for Emergency Assistance;
- Have children under the age of 21, or be pregnant.

The majority of families in this Emergency Assistance system are local Massachusetts families who are experiencing homelessness. However, currently over half of new families applying for shelter are new arrivals, which is defined as families without citizenship or a green card who arrived in Massachusetts in the last thirty days.

To be eligible for shelter, at least one household member must be a citizen, a green card holder, or be present in the United States with the knowledge and consent of the Department of Homeland Security, meaning individuals have made lawful entry into the United States.

What can we do as a community to support these families?

There is going to be a citizen volunteer group who will work with area community groups, residents, religious institutions, and others to welcome and support these families. Once more information is available we will put that out.

For more information about ways to support families in crisis, visit www.mass.gov/sheltercrisis or email shelterhelp@mass.gov.

Will children be required to have currently mandated vaccines that other children in Massachusetts require?

Yes. The Commonwealth provides vaccination services and follow-up with all entrants into the system to make sure requirements are met. Vaccination status is also (and has been for many years) monitored by school health staff and public health staff.

Will the children be enrolled in the Norwood Public Schools?

While some may, others will not. Some children will not be school-aged and others are already enrolled in other school districts in Massachusetts and may opt to continue to attend those schools. Under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, homeless children are guaranteed access to school in either their host community or home community, where feasible, based on what is best for the child and to ensure access to education. The total anticipated impact to the schools is about 40 children. In the district the students are coming from, this amounted to a negligible staffing increase. We may face some additional transportation costs, but this should be close to falling within what the state has allowed.

What is the State's role? What is the Town's role?

The Emergency Assistance program is overseen by DHCD, which manages placements of new families into the system. Shelters are operated by non-profit service providers from the community. All services at the site will be coordinated and paid for by DHCD, and the agency will coordinate closely with the town throughout the process.

What is the impact on public safety?

Town staff have been meeting with counterparts in impacted towns for several months to learn exactly what their impacts have been and what role public safety will play. Both Chief Brooks and Chief Bailey have spoken with their counterparts in several area communities, including

making site visits, and reported no concerns with public safety. Some towns reported an increased call volume to 911 the first ten days or so; however this quickly subsided and is not likely to happen in Norwood as the new arrivals coming here have been in a facility in another community for several months.

How long will families stay at the shelter?

The onsite providers will work with families to help place them into stable housing of their own. There is no minimum or maximum length of stay. Per information provided by the State, families exiting the shelter system in 2023 had stayed in shelters an average of fourteen months.

How is the shelter managed?

There is an on-site service provider that provides clients with case management, connections to resources, housing search assistance, and the coordination of direct care.

How is the shelter funded?

The shelter and all related social services are fully funded by the Commonwealth. The Town does not provide any funding.

How will meals be provided?

An outside vendor will provide food service for shelter residents. In addition, the on-site service provider will assist families in securing groceries, often leveraging benefits like SNAP. The Town is not involved in this contract in any way.

How will individuals and families in shelters receive the resources and support they need?

The on-site provider will ensure families have meals and necessities, provide case management and connection to resources, assist with housing searches, and assist with routine cleaning, maintenance, and security of the property.

Is language assistance being provided?

The Commonwealth provides free, over-the-phone, language translation services. In addition, service providers seek to hire multilingual on-site staff.

Can Norwood refuse a shelter?

No. Local approval to site a shelter is not required, nor do we have any say in location, number of families, etc.

Will Norwood be covered for school costs?

School districts receive emergency aid for transportation, enrollment, and other extra costs for educating Emergency Assistance students at a daily rate of \$104 per student. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education works with impacted school districts to ensure that the

educational needs of any school-aged children living in an emergency shelter are met as quickly as possible.

Additionally, Governor Healey signed a supplemental budget earlier this fiscal year that allows school districts to receive emergency aid more quickly for costs associated with educating children placed in new shelters. Otherwise, the districts would have had to wait much longer for funding for these new students to be incorporated into their state education aid.

The district where these students currently reside had a negligible increase in staffing. Due to space concerns and the potential need to spread students around we may see higher transportation and staffing costs, but they should not vary significantly from the sending district.

Have we communicated with our state legislators?

Yes, we have been in touch with both Representative Rogers and Senator Rush and they have been very supportive and offered their full assistance with anything the Town may need.

Is it a good idea to host migrants with the hospital still under construction?

While there should not be an appreciable increase in 911 calls, we had advised the state we do have concerns that our hospital being down as well as the relative lack of health services in the Town's borders does not make Norwood a suitable location.

Why are hotels being booked now as opposed to earlier in the year?

There are a number of factors, primarily the amount of money the state is paying. When the state first began booking hotels last summer the market rate that was being paid was around \$100/room with the provision of food. Now, the state is paying as high as \$210 per room per night in some areas, with food being provided separately. While we do not know what the contract cost is in Norwood, this amount is well above the market average for small hotels in Norwood and the area. It is likely that the economics simply became too attractive for lower revenue hotels in the area to ignore.

Will there be an impact to Town revenue?

The revenue generated from the hotels tax is the only revenue that would be impacted by the Commonwealth contracting for an entire hotel (property taxes and other fees/utility charges continue to be paid as normal). The Commonwealth pays the rooms tax for the first 90 days, after that there is no provision to pay the local rooms tax. However the Governor's office has stated they are working on a method to assist towns beyond the 90 day period. That being said, with five hotels and a lower occupancy hotel being selected the revenue impact to the Town will be minimal overall. We are reaching out to the hotel owner to see if they will continue to pay the amount otherwise due.

Is the Commonwealth forcing hotels to accept new arrivals?

No. Any hotel is able to accept or not accept a contract with the Commonwealth. Furthermore, hotels are being paid a market rate for rooms, so there is no negative impact to the hotel's bottom line.

If you have additional questions, please contact us at managers@norwoodma.gov. We will work to assist you with any questions you may have.