

Chicago Democrats continue to warehouse migrants in police stations and makeshift shelters

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Over two months into the administration of Chicago mayor Brandon Johnson, more than 800 asylum-seekers are still living in police stations while another 100 are living at O'Hare and Midway airports. As in New York City, the disregard for migrants in Chicago is completely in line with the contempt the Democratic Party has for the working class as a whole.

Aside from the migrants stuck in police stations and airports, 5,445 migrants are staying in city shelters, a 45 percent increase from January. A total of 11,500 asylum-seekers have been bussed to Chicago since August of last year, largely by fascistic Republican Texas governor Greg Abbott.

The Johnson administration has prioritized getting migrants out of police stations as reports emerged of alleged abuses. There is still an open investigation by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability into allegations of sexual contact with underage migrant youth by multiple Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers. Continued abuses of migrants by police at the same time that Johnson continues to make overtures toward CPD threaten the Johnson administration's increasingly threadbare "left" reputation.

Nearly all the help migrants receive at police stations has come, not from the police, but from volunteer organizations.

Anna Gombert, with the Police Station Response Team aid group, spoke at a protest Monday at the downtown Hyatt Regency, where the Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC), the agency in charge of the city's response, was hosting the 18th annual National Homeland Security Association Conference.

Gombert said, "OEMC is not providing meals to

these police stations at all. The people who are providing breakfast and lunch and snacks and baby formula and diapers and special diets are community volunteers."

In some areas of the city, migrants have had to beg on the streets in order to meet their needs. Yesterday, Mayor Johnson attended a Democratic fundraiser with Vice President Kamala Harris in the Gold Coast neighborhood, where plates ranged from \$3,000 to \$10,000, just blocks away from where migrant families have been begging on North Avenue.

WSWS reporters recently spoke to Juan, a father of two in his thirties who emigrated from Venezuela to Chicago earlier this year.

He said the conditions at their shelter, which houses only families, were fine compared to what he had recently experienced. Even though families sleep in groups on cots and food, though regularly provided, is often late, he described the discomfort modestly, stressing that after days of sleeping in the jungles of Central America and later on the streets during the journey north, that little affected him.

He explained that he had had a relatively fortunate experience on his thousand-mile journey compared to others. His account was sufficiently harrowing to make clear the depth of desperation driving whole families to make the journey through several countries, largely on foot, into the United States.

A five inch gash on his calf, got while carrying one of his young children through the jungle, did not prevent his family's movement. The police in Mexico only stole half of his cash. He said, "You know who the real thieves are? The real thieves are the police."

Juan has a college education and previously worked in tourism in Caracas. He and his family left Venezuela due to the collapse of the economy, which has left around half of Venezuelans in extreme poverty. “Work and inflation,” he recounted as the driving factors in his decision to flee.

According to the World Food Program, around one-third of Venezuelans in 2020 were not getting enough to eat, a number which is likely higher as a result of recent inflation in food prices.

With no one in the United States to receive him or provide any sort of aid, he described turning himself into Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after crossing the Rio Grande while carrying one of his children on his shoulders.

After two days in ICE detainment and a stay in a shelter, he was placed on a bus and sent to Chicago. He recounts being told by officials that he was going to “a beautiful city, a sanctuary city, where there would be jobs.”

Worried, he stressed the difficulties he faces in the shelter today. He described waiting for the refugee aid to be able to start building up a life for his family. Stable work, he explained, is difficult to come across while staying in the shelter. Over the summer, he was hired informally to do a job for which he was not paid. “That didn’t work for me.”

“Sundays like today I would like to take my daughters out for ice cream, or a treat, but I can’t. I don’t have the money for it.”

Furthermore, his economic situation has been further burdened by newly acquired medical debt. Upon arriving in Chicago, he had to have his youngest daughter, a toddler, rushed to the hospital. She had developed an abscess during the journey, and by the time the family arrived in Chicago, it had swelled to a large lump.

Moreover, the process of filing for refugee status itself has been extremely tedious. Despite having been put into contact with a social worker, he stressed his inability to get in touch with a legal representative.

“It’s not an easy thing, I call, and call, and call, and get no answer. They are totally congested.”

He explained the bureaucratic process of dealing with immigration services. “I have my first meeting at the beginning of August, just to sign off and put in my

claim for refugee status. My next meeting after that will not be until 2025.”

Although the city has over 45,000 hotel rooms, the Johnson administration continues to place migrants in public neighborhood facilities, such as parks field houses, decommissioned school buildings and community college buildings. These facilities are wholly inappropriate as residential facilities and their overnight transformation into shelters has stoked divisions between migrants and longer-term residents who rely on the limited parks facilities and programs.

Notably, Illinois Democratic Governor J.B. Pritzker is a billionaire scion of the Hyatt hotel fortune. Despite the fact there are more than enough hotel rooms to house every migrant, it is far more important for the capitalist ruling class and their political representatives to protect the immense amounts of money at stake in lucrative concerts and special events, such as Lollapalooza, Taylor Swift concerts and a NASCAR race.



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