# Denver begins discharging migrants from shelters after brief pause

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Hundreds of migrants will have to leave shelters across Denver, Colorado, this week after the Democratic-controlled city resumed discharges from city-run facilities. About 150 people were expected to be discharged on Monday and upwards of 60 people will be discharged every day over the next few months according to Jon Ewing, a spokesman for the Denver Department of Human Resources.

The city paused discharges of migrant families from shelters in November in an effort to reduce the number of people on the street during the cold winter months. But a high influx of migrants, largely from Venezuela, has left shelters with a lack of space to accommodate everyone. According to a city dashboard there are nearly 3,800 migrants in the city's shelters out of more than 38,000 migrants that have arrived over the past two years.

New regulations will allow families up to 42 days (six weeks) and migrants without children just 14 days to stay in a shelter before they are discharged. This is even stricter than constraints in New York City where Democratic Mayor Eric Adams has imposed a 60 day limit for families and 30 days for individuals.

City officials have converted hotel rooms into temporary housing for migrants to expand shelter space. On Monday, the city council approved $25 million to extend an agreement with Quebec Hospitality LLC through June that will fund hotel rooms for migrants. An additional $25 million funding package will be voted on next week, with $15 million coming out of the budget for the renovation of the Denver Human Services Department campus and $10 million from a contingency reserve fund.

During a Town Hall last week Denver Mayor Mike Johnston said that the city has "filled every single hotel room that we have available in the city and county of Denver." Yoli Casas with ViVe Wellness, a partner with the city's migrant response, added, "We have never seen so many people come and so many people in the last year that are going to come out February 5. So February 5 for me is a date that hurts a lot because it's a date that, for various reasons, we're full. There's just no more space."

Not only are migrants being forced out of shelters and hotels in the cold, but migrants must meet strict requirements to even gain access. In order to qualify for the shelter program migrants must have been in the US for less than 30 days before arriving in Denver and they must have an Alien Registration Number. Border Patrol is supposed to create an "A-Number" for every migrant it processes but an internal report by the Department of Homeland Security found that more than a quarter of cases failed to have the proper numbers attached to them. This means many migrants will not have the required paperwork to access services from the city or to apply for work permits.

The cost of living in Denver is incredibly prohibitive for migrants. Average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is over $2,000 a month and many are not eligible for work permits or may have to wait months for paperwork to be processed. As a result, Denver is offering to help migrants move to other cities where the cost of living is lower.

Sheltering the current wave of migrants has come at a steep cost for the city. Denver has already spent close to $40 million and is expecting a budget deficit of $180 million in 2024 if the pace of migration continues. The Johnston administration has reportedly instructed city agencies to cut between five and 15 percent of their budgets to make up for the costs.

This comes on top of existing financial troubles for many city services and agencies. Thousands of migrant

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children have been enrolled in Denver's public schools after budgeting counts ended in October, leaving schools to scramble to hire new Spanish-speaking staff and make room for additional students without support from the state government. Prior to the influx of migrants, Denver's school system was contracting, with several schools closed down due to a decline in enrollment. But with 200-300 new students enrolling each week, schools are stretching reduced resources thin.

Denver Health, which provides care to uninsured people, is simultaneously facing a $100 million budget shortfall. The hospital reports that 20 percent of its patients are homeless and 50 percent on are Medicaid, meaning the hospital is often not fully reimbursed for giving care to patients. The mayor's office has proposed a $30 million funding package, leaving $70 million that will likely have to be paid for in cuts to services and staff. As more migrants arrive and many are forced to live on the street, such services will become increasingly strained to meet the new demand.

Thousands of these migrants were bussed to Denver from Texas, where the fascistic Republican Governor Greg Abbott recently declared an "invasion" of immigrants and usurped federal authority over the border. Abbott has ordered the Texas National Guard to put up razor wire along parts of the border to prevent migrants from crossing. Meanwhile, President Joe Biden has promised to "shut down the border" in exchange for Republican support for funding the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

Amid this bipartisan right-wing assault on the rights of immigrants, no state or federal support is forthcoming to aid in any efforts handling the influx of migrants.

The Colorado state government is unlikely to offer much, if any, assistance as Democratic Governor Jared Polis has embraced the right-wing demand to "secure the border." Instead of offering support to local governments to accommodate migrants, Polis supported bussing immigrants in Colorado to other major cities in the country, only backing off this plan after push-back from Democratic mayors in Chicago and New York. Polis also authorized administrative leave for state employees to volunteer with migrant programs but has taken no real action beyond this.

Mayor Johnston has also vetoed this week a ban on homeless camp sweeps in cold weather. The ordinance, which passed city council 7-6, would have prevented police from forcing people to out of encampments in freezing temperatures. This is an attack on Denver's growing homeless and migrant populations who will face increased risk from the move. Johnston had campaigned for mayor on a promise that he would not conduct camp sweeps without an offer for housing for those displaced. There are an estimated 9,000 homeless people in the Denver metro area where temperatures plunge below freezing in the winter for the full day an average of 21 days per year.

With costs for the city rising and the Democratic Party shifting ever further to the right on immigration, it is only a matter of time before services are dismantled and migrants scapegoated as the cause of declining public services, which have been under attack long before the spike in migration.

The nearly 40,000 migrants in Denver are part of an exodus of people fleeing from Latin America, with hundreds of thousands of people traveling thousands of miles to reach the US border each year. Coming from regions that have been brutally exploited by US imperialism for decades, these migrants have been met with racist and vitriolic attacks from Republicans and Democrats alike. The Biden administration has maintained many of the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration and Democrats have shown they are willing to enact further restrictions on the right of the working class to asylum and migration in exchange for war funding.

The migrant crisis in the United States is not one of immigration, but of the policies of the capitalist class and its state. Resources must be made available for war, and those resources must be procured through the starvation of essential services, particularly for migrants who are increasingly targeted by both major parties as a threat to national security and domestic peace.

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