

# Massachusetts: Democratic governor facilitates Trump's anti-immigrant agenda

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As the Trump administration carries out its crackdown on immigration, Democratic leaders across the country are capitulating to and supporting the vicious assault on the democratic rights of the entire working class.

In Massachusetts, Democratic Party Governor Maura Healey is a willing enforcer of these attacks, scapegoating migrants for petty crime while enacting policy changes that slash assistance for the most vulnerable members of the population, including both undocumented immigrants and US citizens experiencing homelessness.

After chipping away at the state's unique right-to-shelter law for the past two years, Healey is now proposing major changes that would exclude thousands of previously eligible families from receiving shelter.

Proposals announced by Healey this month include

- **Residency requirements:** To qualify for shelter, applicants must demonstrate an "intent to remain in Massachusetts," either through "independent documentary verification" or by having a "physical presence" for the past three months. This could make many newly arrived migrants ineligible for shelter.

- **Elimination of presumed eligibility:** The state would require verification of identity and residency before admitting anyone to the shelter system.

- **Criminal Conviction Disclosure:** Applicants would be required to disclose criminal convictions "in Massachusetts and elsewhere."

These proposed changes abandon key aspects of the state's long-standing right-to shelter law, which once guaranteed shelter for homeless families throughout the state regardless of length of stay, travel history or citizenship status.

Healey, hailed as a "progressive," assumed office in January 2023 during a surge of immigration to Massachusetts that saw an estimated 74,000 people enter the state in 2023 and 90,000 enter in 2024. According to UMass Donahue Institute, this was the highest level of immigration into Massachusetts in over three decades.

The growth in immigration placed strain on the state's emergency shelter system. In August 2023, Healey declared a state of emergency, citing the wave of migration and overwhelmed shelters. She appealed to the federal government for aid and the issuing of expedited work permits for migrants

and called on Massachusetts residents to offer their homes to migrant families. Healey has attributed the state's difficulties to "federal policies on immigration and work authorization, inadequate production of affordable housing" and "the end of COVID-era food and housing security programs."

Amid Healey's claims of a crisis of shelter space, a critical question arises: Why does Massachusetts—the home of super-wealthy individuals like Fidelity Investments CEO Abigail P. Johnson with a net worth of \$16 billion—face a severe shortage of affordable rental homes? Despite allocating funds to assist refugees and immigrants, these efforts remain a drop in the ocean compared to the level of need. This failure stems from a system that prioritizes profit over social well-being, with the Democratic Party acting as an accomplice, implementing measures that restrict access to vital resources such as housing.

In June 2024, in a display of political posturing and as a conciliatory gesture to the hardline stance of the federal government regarding immigration from Latin America, Massachusetts officials, led by then state Emergency Assistance Director Scott Rice, were sent to the southern border to liaison with federal immigration agents from US Customs and Border Protection. Rice, a former Air Force Lieutenant General, declared, "It is essential that we get the word out that our shelters are full so that families can plan accordingly to make sure they have a safe place to go."

Along with this trip to the border, the state allocated a paltry \$2 million to organizations providing support to immigrants and refugees. In November 2024, Healey announced that the number of families the state would accommodate would be capped at 7,500, in direct contravention of the state's obligations under the decades-old right-to-shelter law.

Record levels of immigration into the state continued into 2024. As the emergency shelter program approached the 7,500 "cap," the state began using hotels and unused college dorms as temporary shelters. The government also opened a site at a former prison in Norfolk to house 140 families.

Meanwhile, dozens of Haitian and Venezuelan families began sleeping at Logan Airport, a situation that would last for months and put the desperate conditions facing recently arrived migrants on full display. In June 2024, Healey announced that starting July 9, migrants would be expelled from the airport,

saying the change was a result of “recent efforts to open a new safety-net site, move more families out of shelter, and share a message at the US southern border that Massachusetts is out of shelter space...”

On January 6, 2025, Healey seized on news reports about a “suspected undocumented immigrant” in Revere, arrested by local police on charges of illegal possession of firearms and narcotics, to shift her rhetoric further to the right. She proposed a raft of measures further degrading the state’s shelter system, announcing inspections of all units, and a tightening of the intake process through which families are appraised.

Adapting herself to the fascistic pronouncements of the soon-to-be inaugurated Trump, who regularly claims all immigrants are criminals, Healey declared that the alleged possession of guns and drugs by a single undocumented individual in the state “further underscores our broken federal immigration system and the urgent need for Congress and the White House to act on a border security bill to prevent criminals from entering our communities ...” Acting in lockstep, Massachusetts Republican Chair Amy Carnevale described the minor incident as a “state-funded crime.”

On January 22, two days after Trump’s inauguration, Healey followed up her implicitly anti-immigrant statement with a raft of proposed measures—since approved by the state Senate—that exclude undocumented immigrants from the shelter system entirely. The state now requires “all family members to show they are US citizens or lawfully present in the US, with the rare exception for those households that include a child who is a US citizen or a lawful permanent resident.”

Illustrating the fact that attacks on immigrants are inherently linked to an attack on the broader working class, her proposals also imposed criminal background checks, a “statutory requirement of residency and intent to remain,” the “elimination of presumptive eligibility” and restrictions on shelter for previously evicted families.

Since then, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions have increased in Chelsea and East Boston. The targets of these raids are not limited to alleged violent criminals. Last month, Zeneyda Barrera, an 18-year-old from Lynn, was incarcerated by immigration officials after someone reported her in a domestic disturbance call in an incident involving a fight with her younger brother.

Barrera was at her home when Lynn police arrested her early on January 27. Her stepfather said her arrest was preceded by an argument between her and her 12-year-old brother over a cellphone. The police report states the boy was pushed to the ground.

Barrera was taken to court to see a judge, but to her lawyer’s surprise she was taken into custody by ICE. It is unclear who called ICE to the Lynn District Court. Barrera’s court-appointed defense attorney, Patrick Callahan, had pointed out she had legal status in the country. He confirmed to NBC10 Boston and Telemundo Nueva Inglaterra that Barrera was with

her mother after being released. Barrera was held by ICE for four days.

While the city of Boston has reaffirmed its commitment to its “Trust Act,” which nominally limits cooperation with federal immigration enforcement, it is facing increased pressure from the Trump administration. The Trust Act prevents Boston police from detaining individuals solely for federal immigration officials, unless a criminal warrant exists. Boston officials argue that this policy promotes public safety by encouraging immigrants to report crimes without fear of deportation. The Trust Act has been highlighted by the new administration as an example of policies that hinder immigration enforcement.

Boston is also facing a dispute with ICE regarding the number of ignored detainer requests, along with a congressional probe into its policies.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, along with the mayors of New York, Chicago and Denver, received letters from House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman James Comer, a Republican from Kentucky, who has launched a probe into “the policies of sanctuary jurisdictions and their impact on public safety and federal immigration enforcement.” In the letter to Wu, Comer said, “Boston is a sanctuary jurisdiction that refuses to fully cooperate with federal immigration enforcement” and that all four cities “stand out in their abject failure to comply with federal law.”

In fact, “sanctuary cities” do not prevent federal agencies like ICE from enforcing immigration laws or deporting individuals. Sanctuary cities run by Democrats still enforce local and state laws. Undocumented immigrants accused of crimes are prosecuted under these laws, and sanctuary policies do not shield people from criminal proceedings. For any such immigrants lucky enough to escape conviction by state or local officials, the reactionary Laken Riley Act, passed with the support of the Democrats, now requires the Department of Homeland Security to indefinitely detain any undocumented immigrant who is even accused of committing a wide array of offenses, including nonviolent property crimes.

The Democrats do not represent a bulwark against Trump’s attacks but an integral part of the political establishment that has enabled his rise and continues to collaborate with his agenda. As the Democratic governor in Massachusetts is demonstrating, only the development of a socialist movement of the working class and a break with the two parties of the oligarchs can provide a real alternative to Trump’s attacks.



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