

A message from the CEO



OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, a new wave of immigrant families seeking safety, stability and opportunity have made long journeys to the U.S. only to face more challenges: a shortage of affordable housing and delayed work authorization that force them to begin their lives in Massachusetts in emergency shelters. Thousands of families are living in motel rooms and repurposed dormitories, unsure of their next steps. Assigned immigration statuses that do not

provide housing support and impede their ability to enter the workforce, they have no other option. And now Massachusetts is moving away from its “right-to-shelter” commitment to families.

In August of this year, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey announced a State of Emergency. Then, in mid-October, the Governor declared that the state’s shelter system would reach its capacity, accommodating 7,500 families (24,000 individuals), by the end of the month. Beyond that number, the state will no longer guarantee housing.

Half of the almost 7,500 families in state shelters are newly arrived immigrant families with children. Most of these families have fled violence, political turmoil, and natural disasters in Haiti and in Central and South America and have undergone life-threatening journeys to pursue a better life here. The thousands of families IINE has met and is supporting have come here to work and raise their children away from the horrors they themselves endured. These parents are eager to put down roots, get jobs, and contribute to their new communities. With proper short-term support

to apply for work authorization and find and secure housing, these families will secure jobs in our shrinking workforce, contribute to our communities’ tax bases, and enrich our neighborhoods with their cultures.

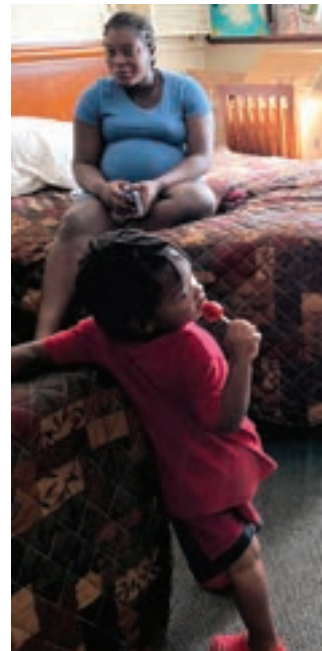
IINE is working with the Healey administration and with federal legislators to immediately support arriving families. We also continue to advocate for more permanent solutions so that when immigrants are admitted to the U.S., there are viable paths for them to remain in the country and support themselves.

As we move forward, we are partnering with our communities to seek solutions. One thing that we know for sure is that you are also part of this response; we will need your continued support.

With gratitude,



Jeffrey Thielman, President and CEO



Haitian families, like the Montinas, face uncertainty and a lack of stability while living in an emergency shelter.

Why So Many Immigrants Are Experiencing Homelessness

HISTORY OF WELCOME: The U.S. has experienced an increase in immigration in recent years, and many immigrants from Haiti specifically are making their way to Massachusetts because it is home to the 3rd largest Haitian diaspora in the U.S. Some are joining family members who have settled in the Bay State, and others

have simply learned from their networks that Massachusetts has a history of providing safety and opportunity. During our 2023 fiscal year, IINE served 5,869 clients from Haiti.

UNABLE TO IMMEDIATELY WORK: Immigrant families are coming from Central and South American and Caribbean countries that are being devastated by political instability, violence, environmental disasters, and famine. They are being assigned a variety of temporary immigration statuses that each include different rights and benefits; none include a

pathway to permanent residency in the U.S. Many are not immediately authorized to work despite being of working age and employable.

NO AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Massachusetts is the only state in the U.S. with a “right-to-shelter” law, mandating that housing must be provided for families with children and expectant mothers. Alarming, the state also has an affordable housing crisis which has been growing for thirty years and is peaking just as thousands of new residents are entering at once.

Helping Immigrants Avoid Emergency Shelters

When immigrants enter the U.S. with immigration statuses that give them the right to housing assistance from resettlement agencies, enough cash assistance to pay rent, and immediate employment authorization, they can avoid the emergency shelter system altogether. IINE, in partnership with other local agencies, continues to advocate for:

MORE STATE FUNDING for housing support and basic needs support

REDIRECTED FUNDING from emergency shelters to create permanent housing

IMMEDIATE PERMISSION for eligible immigrants to work in the U.S. upon arrival

MORE EQUITABLE SERVICES eligibility for immigrants with different statuses

Helping Immigrants Within Emergency Shelters Work Towards Stability

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM The goal of IINE programming is to support refugees and immigrants who arrive with few resources to quickly progress toward self-sufficiency. In partnership with the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants, we have started to adopt that model to support families in emergency shelter. IINE’s newly created Emergency Response Team is helping these families to gain work authorization to secure immediate employment, apply for asylum for a chance to stay in the U.S. permanently, and access public benefits, such as food, healthcare, and school enrollment.

TEAM MEMBERS Shelter Services Director, Staff Attorney, Case Specialists, Paralegals

CLIENTS 250 families, 800 people, 8 emergency shelters, 7 communities

CURRENT ACTIVITIES Connection to federal benefits including cash assistance, food assistance and healthcare, and school enrollment. Support with applying for work authorization. Immigration Legal Assistance.

EVOLVING ROLE On average, it takes 18-24 months for a family to have all of the supports in place to exit an emergency shelter into more permanent housing. With the system now at capacity, that amount of time is simply not available. To meet this challenge, IINE is helping the state to identify expedited exit solutions. To become self-sufficient, newly arrived immigrant families need English language skills, digital and financial literacy, workforce preparation, employment, and housing support.



A client shares a personal family photo while receiving help from IINE staff.

Q&A

IINE Chief Program Officer, Anca Moraru

Q: When we say “emergency shelters” what types of facilities are included?

A: In Massachusetts, emergency shelters include congregant living facilities. Because of the influx of immigrants, the state had to add non-traditional emergency shelter options including hotel and motel rooms and repurposed dorms. IINE is currently managing eight unsupported emergency shelter sites and all of those are “unstaffed,” meaning not managed by shelter providers.

Q: City and town governments, local volunteers, and the National Guard have been called in to help coordinate the emergency response in unstaffed shelters. How is IINE working with them?

A: The state has appointed regional coordinators to coordinate the support of towns, volunteers, resettlement agencies, and the National Guard at the 47 unsupported shelters across Massachusetts. We have discovered that each shelter is supported and managed differently, and we are trying to work within this context. The National Guard is responsible for the safety of the families, and they coordinate food delivery to them. We are not working closely with the National Guard at this time.

Q: IINE has expertise in the legal and case management services we’re providing in emergency shelters—but we’ve never provided them in this context. What are we finding some of the biggest challenges to be?

A: It is challenging to work with families experiencing so much transition. In the shelter system, it is much more difficult for them to adjust to their new lives in the U.S. They are not able to cook their own food or feel at home. Many are unsure about their next steps and feel disoriented. The uncer-

tainty is very hard on these families. All they want is to find stable housing, get a job, and be able to provide for their families.

Q: Right now, we have a State of Emergency in Massachusetts. Are there similar challenges with affordable housing in New Hampshire, and how are we responding?

A: There were issues in both states with affordable housing before the State of Emergency. We’ve been dealing with a lack of housing affordability and availability for years and have heard that these are challenges for agencies in our network throughout the country. IINE has incredibly talented and hardworking housing specialists and case specialists who cultivate relationships with landlords in our communities and find placements for clients whose immigration status provides housing support before they can cover their rent with earned income. In New Hampshire, IINE has had funding to supplement clients’ rents until they are ready to take over their expenses.

Q: IINE has needed to mobilize quickly to address this new challenge. What can you tell us about the team that’s coming together?

A: It’s certainly a challenge to hire the team, build the program, and serve so many incoming clients all at the same time. In part, we’ve been able to provide services to clients thanks to other IINE non-program staff who have volunteered their time and joined us in the shelters. At this time, we have four people on the team. All of them speak Haitian Creole or French. They are all very passionate about working with this population and are ready to do whatever it takes to help. We need more staff, but uncertainty in funding is a major challenge to recruiting.



How You Can Help?



ADVOCATE

Let your legislators **know** that you are concerned about new families and want them to support adequate funding and resources to help them integrate.



DONATE GOODS

Donate household goods and supplies. Find a **list of needs** on our website.



VOLUNTEER

Explore **numerous volunteer opportunities**, including transporting clients to appointments, tutoring, delivering food, and more, on our website.



SPONSOR A FAMILY

Community Sponsorship is a collaborative effort between groups of people, immigrants, and resettlement staff that work together to prepare for and welcome new arrivals. **Learn more about this opportunity** on our website.

A Long and Dangerous Journey Fueled by Hope

LAST APRIL, Robinson and Claudia left everything they knew behind. Political instability and the constant threat of violence had made life in Haiti impossible. Not only did they feel unsafe, but they said they no longer “felt human.”

Their long journey to find a new home and safety took them through ten countries and three refugee camps. When they finally entered the U.S., Robinson and Claudia’s immigration status did not provide them with housing support or authorization to apply for work. They now live with their two children in a hotel room within the state’s emergency shelter system.

“The reason why I’m still in the shelter is because I can’t be sustainable, can’t pay for myself because I’m not working at the moment. That’s the only reason why I’m still there. But as soon as I can get an opportunity to actually work and provide, I’ll be able to get out of the shelter.”

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—ROBINSON, A HAITIAN IMMIGRANT AND IINE CLIENT

IINE has been able to provide Robinson and Claudia with case management services, connecting them to federal benefits; helping them make and pursue a plan to learn, work, and find permanent housing; and enrolling them in English language classes. Robinson has said that despite their incredibly difficult journey, he still has hope. “I’m still an optimist because whenever you get a chance to go to school and you get to work, you get a chance to make your life better.”



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