

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Vice Chair Collins:

We urge you to support an increase in funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Shelter and Services Program (SSP) in the upcoming appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for fiscal year (FY) 2024.

FEMA's SSP has become a critical lifeline for local communities hosting newly arriving migrants. SSP, which replaced FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program-Humanitarian (EFSP-H) last year,¹ provides federal funds to nonprofits, as well as state, local, and tribal governments, that operate shelters for migrants. SSP funds can be used for shelter costs, food, medical care, transportation, and other essential services.²

Earlier this month, the Senate voted against a supplemental appropriations bill that would have allocated up to \$1.4 billion for SSP — though with conditions requiring Immigration and Customs Enforcement to ramp up its detention and deportation capacity in order to unlock one-third of that amount.³ The Senate then failed to advance an amendment to the supplemental bill H.R. 815 that we and several of our colleagues introduced and that would have appropriated \$5 billion for SSP without conditions.⁴

It is critical that the upcoming appropriations bill include sufficient funding for SSP. President Biden requested \$1.4 billion in SSP funds for FY 2024.⁵ But as local officials and members of

¹ Congressional Research Service, "Migrant Assistance Through the FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)," August 31, 2023, p. 40, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homsec/R47681.pdf>.

² Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Fiscal Year 2023 Shelter and Services Program Frequently Asked Questions," August 21, 2023, <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/shelter-services-program/fy-23-faqs>.

³ Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, H.R. 815, Sec. 211, pp. 81-83, <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/24403084/read-text-of-senators-proposed-border-deal-and-foreign-aid-package.pdf>.

⁴ Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren, "Warren, Padilla, Senators Push Funding Increase for FEMA's Shelter and Services Program," press release, February 12, 2024, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-padilla-senators-push-funding-increase-for-femas-shelter-and-services-program>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Supplemental Funding Request," October 20, 2023, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/10/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-supplemental-funding-request>; White House, "Letter Regarding Critical National Security Funding Needs for FY 2024," press release, October 20, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/briefing-room/2023/10/20/letter->

Congress have repeatedly noted, \$1.4 billion is insufficient to meet the migrant shelter needs of border and interior communities.⁶ Massachusetts alone anticipates spending roughly \$900 million on its emergency shelter system during FY 2025,⁷ and nearly half of the families in its shelter system are newly arriving migrants.⁸ We therefore urge that you support appropriating enough SSP funds to meaningfully relieve the budgetary burden on state and local host communities. We specifically request the allocation of \$5 billion in SSP funds.

SSP funding is vital for the Commonwealth. Massachusetts is the only state in the country with a law that guarantees families a right to shelter.⁹ Since August 2022, demand for shelters has ballooned, and Massachusetts has scrambled to find additional spaces to use as shelters, turning to motels, a military base, university dormitories, and other temporary locations.¹⁰ In November 2023, the state hit its shelter capacity limit of 7,500¹¹ and now maintains a rapidly growing waiting list of over 650 additional families who are eligible for shelter but remain

regarding-critical-national-security-funding-needs-for-fy-2024/.

⁶ Letter from the United States Conference of Mayors to Senators and Representatives, November 7, 2023, <https://knowlegis.cq.com/file/download/1vF9R1CHj6P/Mayors+Letter+to+Congress+on+Security+Supplementa+110723.docx.pdf/>; Letter from Senators Tammy Duckworth and Richard J. Durbin to Chair Patty Murray and Ranking Member Susan Collins, January 24, 2024, <https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/240124duckworthdurbinjointlettertosenateappropriationscommitteesupportoffemasspfundingrequestfrominteriorcities.pdf>; Letter from Mayor Mike Johnston, et al., to President Joseph R. Biden, October 28, 2023, https://denvergov.org/files/assets/public/v/1/mayor/documents/mayors-letter-to-biden-congressional-leadership_oct2023.pdf.

⁷ GBH, “Healey outlines plan to pay mounting family shelter costs,” Katie Lannan, December 19, 2023, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/politics/2023-12-19/healey-outlines-plan-to-pay-mounting-family-shelter-costs>; Letter from Secretary Matthew J. Gorkowicz and Secretary Edward Augustus to Chair Michael J. Rodrigues and Chair Aaron Michlewitz, January 1, 2024, pp. 3-4, <https://bloximages.chicago2.vip.townnews.com/statehousenews.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/f/c1/fc1dbaa6-a9bd-11ee-af82-f7af30917651/65948d99d6908.pdf.pdf>.

⁸ Letter from Secretary Matthew J. Gorkowicz and Secretary Edward Augustus to Chair Michael J. Rodrigues and Chair Aaron Michlewitz, January 1, 2024, p. 2, <https://bloximages.chicago2.vip.townnews.com/statehousenews.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/f/c1/fc1dbaa6-a9bd-11ee-af82-f7af30917651/65948d99d6908.pdf.pdf>; Massachusetts Municipal Association, “Fact Sheet: Emergency Assistance Program in Massachusetts,” September 13, 2023, p. 2, https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Emergency-Shelter_Fact-Sheet-FAQ-Sept-2023.pdf.

⁹ MassLive, “7 things to know about Mass. ‘right-to-shelter’ as budget vote looms,” Luis Fieldman, November 14, 2023, <https://www.masslive.com/politics/2023/11/7-things-to-know-about-mass-right-to-shelter-as-budget-vote-looms.html>.

¹⁰ WBUR, “Mass. opens second intake center and shelter for unhoused, migrant families,” Alison Kuznitz, July 31, 2023, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/07/31/intake-shelter-homeless-migrant-families-quincy>; Massachusetts Municipal Association, “Fact Sheet: Emergency Assistance Program in Massachusetts,” September 13, 2023, pp. 1, 6, https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Emergency-Shelter_Fact-Sheet-FAQ-Sept-2023.pdf.

¹¹ GBH, “Mass. shelters hit capacity, sending new migrant families and unhoused to waitlist,” Sarah Betancourt, November 9, 2023, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/national/2023-11-09/mass-shelters-hit-capacity-sending-new-migrant-families-and-unhoused-to-waitlist>.

unhoused.¹² Some of the waitlisted families are in overflow sites,¹³ but even those sites are full, leaving others to sleep in airport lobbies and cars in below-freezing weather.¹⁴ The Commonwealth is working tirelessly to help migrant families secure long-term housing and rental assistance, as well as employment authorizations and job opportunities, so that they can exit the shelter system and support themselves.¹⁵ But in the short term, the Commonwealth urgently needs an influx of federal assistance to meet migrants' housing needs.

SSP funding for Massachusetts to date has been inadequate. Last year, Massachusetts received \$1.9 million in SSP funding, out of the \$363 million made available nationwide during the summer of 2023.¹⁶ Massachusetts requires additional SSP funding to cover even a fraction of the state's costs for its migrant response.

The SSP appropriation language should maximize funding access for the full range of migrants and service providers in need. First, we encourage you to include a proviso stating that SSP funds are not limited to entities that previously applied for or received SSP or EFSP-H funds. Second, we ask that you encourage a competitive grant process for the distribution of at least a portion of SSP funds and ensure that any distribution formula account for data on the final destination of migrants. Additionally, SSP funds are currently only available for migrants who are within 45 days of release from DHS custody,¹⁷ meaning that migrants who have taken 46 days to reach Massachusetts are excluded from SSP assistance, even if they have not spent a single night in a shelter. Congress should make clear that SSP funds can be used for migrants who were released from Customs and Border Protection custody more than 45 days ago.

Massachusetts is committed to welcoming new arrivals and is striving to ensure that each family in the state lives with dignity and in safe, stable housing. At the same time, meeting the needs of newly arriving migrants is a national responsibility, and the federal government must ramp up its assistance to state and local host communities.

¹² WWLP, "Massachusetts shelter waitlist grows due to lack of affordable housing," Ellen Fleming, January 29, 2024, <https://www.wwlp.com/news/local-news/massachusetts-shelter-waitlist-grows-due-to-lack-of-affordable-housing/>; WBUR, "Massachusetts overflow shelters, as seen through one family's eyes," Gabrielle Emanuel, February 5, 2024, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2024/02/05/homeless-overflow-shelter-waitlist-logan>.

¹³ WBUR, "Pretty bleak': Waitlist for family shelter tops 200 households after first month," Gabrielle Emanuel, December 11, 2023, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/12/11/shelter-waitlist-massachusetts-family-homeless>.

¹⁴ WBUR, "Massachusetts overflow shelters, as seen through one family's eyes," Gabrielle Emanuel, February 5, 2024, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2024/02/05/homeless-overflow-shelter-waitlist-logan>; WBUR, "'Beyond terrible': With overflow shelters full, families huddle in cars and at Logan," Gabrelle Emanuel, January 24, 2024, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2024/01/24/homeless-family-waitlist-overflow>.

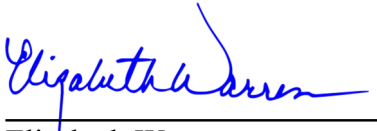
¹⁵ NBC Boston, "Mass. pilot program aims to help migrants find housing," Carla Rojo, February 12, 2024, <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/mass-pilot-program-aims-to-help-migrants-find-housing/3277733/>.

¹⁶ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "Healey-Driscoll Administration and Wu Administration Receive Nearly \$2 Million in Federal Funding to Support Migrant Housing," press release, August 18, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-and-wu-administration-receive-nearly-2-million-in-federal-funding-to-support-migrant-housing>; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Shelter and Services Program (SSP): Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress," October 18, 2023, pp. 8, 12, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/2023_1018_fema_shelter_and_services_program_fy23.pdf.

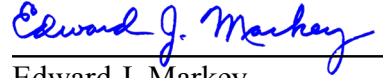
¹⁷ Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Fiscal Year 2023 Shelter and Services Program Frequently Asked Questions," August 21, 2023, <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/shelter-services-program/fy-23-faqs>.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator