

# The Welcoming City

The Lightfoot Administration's  
Response to the Asylum Seeker Mission ★





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# Introduction: Chicago's Asylum Seeker Mission



## Background/History

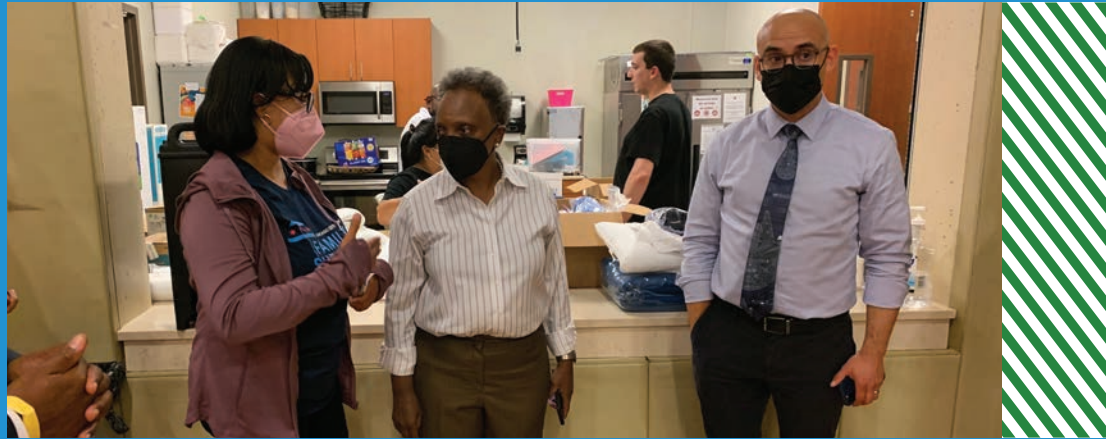
During the summer of 2022, Texas officials dispatched buses with thousands of individuals and families to Chicago, Washington D.C., and New York City. The first bus arrived in Chicago on August 31, 2022, with almost 100 people who had entered the U.S. through the southern border seeking asylum. While most asylum seekers are from Venezuela, families and individuals hail from all over the world including countries in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. On September 14, 2022, Governor JB Pritzker issued an emergency disaster proclamation to speed up the procurement of immediate resources needed to help Chicago and the State provide humanitarian assistance. By January 2023, Texas had chartered over 108 buses with 5,146 individuals to Chicago. The buses arrived with no coordination or information from the State of Texas Governor's Office. The asylum seekers were placed on buses with no food, limited access to water, and often in need of medical care. Upon arrival to Chicago, they required shelter, medical care, food, and access to clothing and other necessities.

In addition to the buses, The City of Chicago experienced an increase of asylum seekers arriving through other modes of transportation also seeking shelter and resources. As of April 28th, 2023, over 3,000 individuals who arrived by

some other means requested shelter placement through the 3-1-1 process. This increase of shelter requests occurred because community organizations along the southern border purchased airline or bus tickets to other cities, including Chicago, without any coordination or confirmation of shelter space.

In response, the City of Chicago structured an emergency response plan activating all city departments and sister agencies to provide the necessary care and support. As a Welcoming City, by ordinance and historically, the City of Chicago understood its responsibility to provide access to shelter, food, and medical care to everyone regardless of immigration status. Many of the asylum seekers traveled hundreds of miles on foot, navigating great danger through multiple countries, in pursuit of safety and opportunity in the United States. The City of Chicago, under the Lightfoot administration, committed to assisting the newly arrived families and individuals by providing human services with dignity and respect.

# Message from the Mayor



## Dear Residents,

Throughout its history, Chicago has represented hope and opportunity for generations of immigrants and refugees. Foreign-born residents come to us from over 140 countries, speaking more than 100 languages, and add to the vibrant fabric of this city.

When the Governor of Texas began his inhumane campaign to bus asylum seekers with zero coordination and communication with receiving cities, Chicago did what Chicago always does: we stepped up. This manufactured crisis provided an opportunity to not only proclaim Chicago as a Welcoming City but live out those values. As this operation continued, Chicago showcased that it is possible for local government to lead with partnership, collaboration, and unity.

The City of Chicago, State of Illinois, Cook County, delegate agencies, community organizations, faith leaders, and Chicagoans across the city met the moment by mobilizing almost instantaneously to welcome, feed, clothe, and shelter migrants. I am tremendously proud of our workers, community leaders, faith leaders, and volunteers who responded with compassion and empathy.

Chicago does not shy away from hard work – we are ready to roll up our sleeves – but we cannot do it alone. We need more federal funding to sustain these operations and support resettlement efforts. Most importantly, we need Congress to meet the moment with us, lead our nation forward, and finally pass comprehensive immigration reform.

Amid the confusion, we provided clarity. Amid the despair, we provided hope. We are Chicago – a Welcoming City. This report tells the story of how Chicago welcomed thousands of people with dignity and respect and provides a preview of our newest neighbors' next steps in their long journeys.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori E. Lightfoot". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot

# Message from the Office of Emergency Management and Communications



Since August 31, 2022, the City of Chicago has welcomed thousands of asylum-seekers to the city and provided them with shelter, safety and a chance for a better future. These include individuals, families, children, and infants seeking refuge after crossing the southern border.

The enclosed report lays out the City of Chicago's response to this humanitarian crisis and will serve as a foundation to build upon as the operation continues. The citywide coordination efforts are led by the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) in conjunction with Department of Family Support Services (DFSS) and the Mayor's Office.

As part of the coordination efforts, OEMC activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and hosted partners from various City, County and State jurisdictions, along with Federal partners, in a Unified Area Command (UAC) to quickly deploy resources to support and manage the operation. As detailed in the plan, this robust response included various City departments, county, state, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide a framework to mobilize a multifaceted strategy and provide a planning foundation for a sustained operation.

At times, this complex mission has been unpredictable, and we have learned many valuable lessons along the way. OEMC emergency managers set up temporary shelters within days and sometimes hours of receiving word that buses were heading to Chicago and without knowing anything about the passengers. Upon arrival, emergency managers were on the ground at the Landing Zone at Union Station to welcome

the asylum seekers and provide them with immediate transportation to a shelter and essential services to begin their new lives.

I am incredibly proud of the efforts put forth by City of Chicago staff, volunteers and partner agencies who have worked tirelessly to welcome the asylum seekers, providing essential items, medical attention, shelter, and long-term housing coupled with resettlement and integration services. Our goal was to ensure that all resources needed were put in place and available to support this crisis.

Since the first bus, we have focused our efforts on building a scalable, adaptable plan and stabilizing the existing mission for the long-term. We are committed to this mission and will position the City to continue to support this effort.

As we enter a new phase, the lessons we learned over the past several months will inform the City's future planning. I am honored to have been a part of an emergency response of this magnitude to welcome all the City's asylum seekers and usher them into the next stage of their journey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rich Guidice'.

Rich Guidice | Executive Director

Office of Emergency Management and Communications



# Message from the Department of Family and Support Services



The first bus of asylum seekers from Texas arrived in Chicago on August 31st, 2022. We did not receive any notice from Texas officials, nor were we provided the opportunity to coordinate or plan for their arrival.

Within 24-hours, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) worked with the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC), the Office of Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, and many others to develop a plan that would welcome each person stepping off the first bus.

Now, as we pass the six-month mark of this operation, we have welcomed over 5,100 asylum seekers to the city. They are greeted with food, shelter, clothing, immediate services – and most importantly, warmth and kindness. For the first time in a long time, these individuals can rest knowing that they were in a space where people are genuinely concerned for their wellbeing.

In partnership with organizations like The Salvation Army, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, the National Immigrant Justice Center, Cook County Health, Grace and Peace Church, New Life Community Church and many others, we provided care that is both culturally competent and trauma-informed.

That trauma-informed care is crucial right now. We know that many individuals who have made this journey were fleeing violence, persecution, and instability in their home countries.

Instead of receiving the same cold, unwelcoming response they have experienced along their harrowing journey, asylum seekers are given the respect that should be afforded to all people as we welcome them to Chicago.

Having stood up over a dozen different shelters across the city and connecting thousands to housing and services, we have effectively created an entirely new shelter structure on top of maintaining an already strained homeless shelter system. We continue to see up to 200 new asylum seekers each week and respond in kind with support from a wealth of Chicago organizations and communities ready to support our newest residents.

As the daughter of an immigrant, I understand the challenges that our newest Chicagoans face as they seek stability and security. I recognize the barriers they face and the anxiety they feel adjusting to a new environment. I also know that Chicago is, in fact, a welcoming city. We live our values every day, and welcome vulnerable people with dignity and grace – no matter their situation or station in life. As the City builds a long-term response to this new responsibility, we welcome the support of all Chicagoans.

Chicago is an incredible city due in part to the long history of immigrants near and far to create the interwoven fabric of our neighborhoods. There is still more work ahead as we continue resettlement efforts dedicated to inclusion, but I am optimistic we can ensure success by working together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brandie V. Knazze".

Brandie V. Knazze | Commissioner

Department of Family and Support Services

# Message from the Office of New Americans



Established in 2011, the Office of New Americans (ONA) is dedicated to improving services and engaging Chicago's diverse immigrant and refugee communities through collaboration with community organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector. Since the beginning of Mayor Lightfoot's administration, ONA worked on improving the day-to-day experiences of our city's 560,000 foreign-born residents while focusing on their economic development, community well-being, and civic integration.

In the asylum seeker operation, ONA played the role of prognosticator. Noticing the trend of Texas targeting blue cities, ONA briefed Mayor Lightfoot on the possibility of the City of Chicago becoming the next receiving city. Prior to the first bus, Chicago convened leaders to discuss possible contingency plans with City departments and community partners.

Once the buses began to arrive, ONA welcomed buses at Union Station to guide asylum seekers to shelter or reunify families; gathered intelligence from the border; and briefed community-based organizations with updates, next steps, and ways to support. ONA also provided guidance on immigration law and policy, addressed misconceptions about asylum seekers, and worked with community partners to advocate for federal support.

As the Office charged with ensuring that Chicago remains a Welcoming City, it was heartening to witness the hundreds of Chicagoans who stepped up to meet the moment and combat the vitriol targeted towards immigrants. As the City moves to the next phase, ONA stands ready to advocate for more federal support to receiving cities and for a national asylum process that reflects Chicago's long-standing values.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink on a blue background.

Nubia Willman | Chief Engagement Officer  
Director of the Office of New Americans





# Section 1: Welcome to Chicago







## Section 1: Welcome to Chicago

Over the last several months, the City of Chicago welcomed over 5,100 asylum seekers transported in 108 chartered buses from Texas and Colorado. City, State, and County officials worked in partnership with delegate agencies, faith leaders, and volunteers to provide critical services to thousands of asylum seekers. While most asylum seekers are from Venezuela, individuals and families are also from Nicaragua, Cuba, and other parts of the world including Iran, Haiti, and Angola.

The entire city apparatus mobilized to address this humanitarian crisis. The City coordinated shelter, food, clothing, and health care, as well as access to legal information and education in culturally appropriate languages.

While buses paused after January 2023, people continue to cross the border. The City of Chicago continues to respond to an increase of asylum seekers arriving to Chicago on their own, often without resources. During the second week of March 2023, the City reached a new record for shelter placement via 3-1-1 with 201 calls from asylum seekers in need of emergency shelter. To date, there are over 3,100 individuals walking into the City shelter system.

## Landing Zone

"Welcome to Chicago, you are safe. If you have family in Chicago, we can help you reconnect. If you need shelter, please follow the city staff outside and enter the city buses en route to a shelter where you will eat, shower, and rest."

These were the first words uttered by City staff and volunteers who welcomed 108 buses from the southern border.

Because the Texas Governor refused to communicate with City officials, information was often inaccurate. It was not uncommon for City teams to wait several hours for an incoming bus or to receive a bus with an unknown manifest of passengers or their needs. At Union Station, OEMC coordinated with Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) to ensure that CTA buses were ready to transport asylum seekers to shelter.

Chicago Fire Department (CFD) provided paramedics in case of an immediate health emergency while the Chicago Police Department (CPD) ensured orderly transition from charter bus to CTA bus. In collaboration with delegate agencies, staff from various departments volunteered to welcome asylum seekers. They, along with community partners, provided guidance on next steps in the journey. Every department had a role in this operation, including Chicago Animal Care and Control (CACC). On more than one occasion, CACC provided food and vaccines for pets who made the long trek with their owners. After asylum seekers had a day to decompress, they were transported via the CTA to the Multi-Agency Response Center (MARC) for further assistance.



**"Welcome to Chicago, you are safe.** If you have family in Chicago, we can help you reconnect. If you need shelter, please follow the city staff outside and enter the city buses en route to a shelter where you will eat, shower, and rest."

★ City of Chicago Staff and Volunteers



## Shelter

Before the first buses arrived, the City shelter system was already overwhelmed with 3,000 shelter beds at 98% capacity. To avoid further strain on the City's homeless infrastructure system, the City of Chicago structured separate shelter bed capacity for new arrivals. The City assessed its available assets and mobilized emergency shelters, often in the span of a few hours. Zero dollars were diverted from the City's regular shelter system to support asylum seeker shelters.

On August 31, 2022, the City stood up two shelters with less than 24 hours' notice before the arrival of the first set of buses. This fast action was due to the prior assessment meetings that allowed City officials to conduct preliminary inventories of City assets that could be used for shelter. However, activating a shelter requires many more resources. In response, the Salvation Army's Shield of Hope agreed to serve as a family shelter and The Freedom Center sheltered single men and single women. At the height of arrivals, the City stood up and repurposed a total of 13 shelter locations.

Upon arrival to shelter, a welcome orientation is conducted, and initial intake is completed. This originally happened with City staff requiring translator support from other City staff volunteers and community organizations. As the operation stabilized, the City transitioned to bilingual staff.

Asylum seekers are provided with the same resources as other shelter residents throughout the City. This includes:

- Cot + blanket + pillow
- Three meals per day
- Showers and towels
- Hygiene kits: toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, soap, shampoo
- Clothing and shoes, when available through donations
- Access to laundry room
- Personal protective equipment

The City team considered over 200 locations for shelter across the city including decommissioned schools, Park District facilities, libraries, and other city assets. Upon review, many facilities did not meet health, safety, and capacity requirements. To expand the search for viable facilities, the City released a survey to identify private buildings or spaces available to serve as temporary shelter locations. Ideal facilities need space for eating; a communal area for gathering space; showers; and room for laundry hookup.

DFSS works with community-based organizations to provide Know Your City Rights presentations at shelters to ensure that asylum seekers are well-informed. The Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) and the Office of Labor Standards (OLS) also provide labor rights and wage theft prevention awareness on site.





## The MARC

In order to connect asylum seekers to services, the City launched a reception center known as the Multi-Agency Resource Center (the MARC). This reception center, originally was located at the North Park Village facility, and later located at Arturo Velazquez Institute, a satellite campus of Daley College.

At the height of bus arrivals, the MARC operated five days a week from 9AM – 5PM. The MARC provided a centralized location for in-depth intake and connection to wrap-around services. Led by DFSS and OEMC, the MARC housed several services including legal orientation, medical care, casework management, and donations.

- Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) supported planning and logistics.
- Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) enrolled eligible individuals to programs like the Victims of Trafficking, Torture and other Serious Crimes benefits program.

- National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) led legal presentations to ensure that asylum seekers understood the next steps in their case.
- The Resurrection Project (TRP) and Community Navigators from the City's Legal Protection Fund provided translation services.
- Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Cook County Department of Public Health coordinated medical screenings.
- Catholic Charities facilitated outmigration to ensure asylum seekers arrived to their final destination.
- The Office of the City Clerk provided the City Key.

On February 22, 2023, in-person MARC operations transitioned to shelter-based service connections.



## Public Health and Mental Health

The public health and mental health infrastructure experienced an already strained workforce due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, through collaboration between CDPH, Cook County Health (CCH), Chicago Fire Department and healthcare partners medical screenings were provided at the landing zone, the MARC, and at shelters. The City's paramedics stood ready at the landing zone to care for asylum seekers with injuries of all types, including dehydration and those with acute healthcare needs.

CDPH continues to work closely with its partners to arrange vaccination clinics for shelters. The Lead Coordinating Organizations (LCOs) through CDPH are Heartland Alliance Health (HAH) and Lawndale Christian Health Center who provide non-emergency care at the shelter including, COVID-19 testing and vaccinations.

Access to mental health care continues to be another critical need. Asylum seekers arrive with trauma and stress stemming from their conditions at home, which is exacerbated during an arduous journey to the United States. While arriving to Chicago provides some stability, ongoing trauma, anxiety, and stress impact behavioral health. CDPH, in partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), share their helpline to shelters to ensure asylum seekers and staff have a resource for mental health support. Likewise, the Coalition for Immigrant Mental Health (CIMH), a community-based organization, developed a capacity-building initiative to support non-mental health professionals supporting asylum seekers. This included training for the Legal Protection Fund's Community Navigators and shelter staff working directly with asylum seekers.

## Donations and Volunteers

The Asylum seekers Donations Committee comprised of Mayor's Office, Department of Family Support Services, and Office of Emergency Management and Communication staff managed the City's donations strategy to fulfill basic needs requests from shelters, they convened weekly to respond to the changing and dynamic need for supplies for asylum seekers.

The outpouring of support from Chicagoans often came in the form of donations. In the beginning, the City launched a website to share ways to help. Aldermanic offices were also used as drop-off sites. Once a week, OEMC staff, supported by infrastructure departments, picked up and transported donations to a central site where City staffers and volunteers sorted items.

This process quickly proved unsustainable with items donated not appropriate for wear. Instead, in partnership with the City, Instituto del Progreso Latino launched an Amazon Wish List where residents and corporate partners could purchase new items to be delivered directly to the donation center. The City's process allows shelter managers to submit resource requests and staff sorts donations and prepares orders for pick up and distribution by OEMC traffic management.

Throughout this mission, the City has relied largely on city staff to volunteer, or be detailed, to shelters, holding spaces, the donation center, and at the landing zone. The City established a volunteer pool as a staffing solution, focusing on weekend needs, with at least 10 individuals available each day.







## Section 2: Resettlement and Integration



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### CPS' Newest Students

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) role is to enroll the City's newest students to schools closest to the family shelter in which they reside. To date, Chicago Public Schools has enrolled 296 asylum-seeking families. Through the existing Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS), CPS schools and networks address barriers for students by providing services, like transportation, school uniforms, school supplies, fee waivers, and referrals to community resources. This is the third refugee student response CPS has activated in the past year and a half; beginning with Afghan children in summer 2021 and Ukrainian students in winter 2022. CPS uses its vast experience with new arriving students to enroll asylum seekers and provide appropriate support to them and their families. As is historically the case, the school system acts as a community resource for newly arrived families.

### Asylum Seekers Advisory Group

To ensure a successful resettlement and integration to Chicago, community input must be part of the equation. The City recommends assembling an Asylum Seekers Advisory Group. A group of individuals to guide long term resettlement for homeless asylum seekers in City care. The advisory group should be comprised of subject matter experts, delegate agency representatives, community leaders, and asylum seekers.

The group's purpose is to set best practices, center community voice in the City's response efforts, and ensure a lasting and successful resettlement. Members will be expected to serve a one-year term and make recommendations in the areas of housing, mental health, legal support, and community integration.

### Resettlement

Historically, the City of Chicago does not actively participate in the resettlement of new arrivals. Those who enter as legally classified refugees are partnered with resettlement organizations who support their resettlement efforts. For other immigrants, how they resettle into the city has been dependent on whatever community support the individual can establish. Local government played a passive role at best. However, the increase of asylum seekers afforded the City an opportunity to determine how it would participate in

resettlement. In response, the City recognized its responsibility to establish a new protocol to welcome new arrivals. The City activated increased long-term housing, legal services, and other support to help off ramp individuals from emergency shelter and provide stability as they move on to their next phase in the United States.

#### + Outmigration.

Over 685 asylum seekers have out-migrated from City shelters. Catholic Charities connects and reunifies asylum seekers by purchasing bus tickets, ride-hailing services, or airline tickets. To ensure that asylum seekers arrive to a safe destination, Catholic Charities requests for a verified address before purchasing transportation. Relocation services remain a critical aspect to this mission.

#### + Shelter policy.

Following the lead of the State, on March 20th, 2023, the City instituted a 30-day stay policy. The policy activates in phases, beginning with those who have been in shelter the longest. Shelter staff convene individual meetings with residents to discuss timeline, share available resources, and to prepare residents for their next steps. Opportunities for extensions may be available based upon extenuating circumstances. Through the State's Asylum Seeker Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ASERAP), eligible families may receive six months of rental assistance administered through the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). Families receive individual follow-up appointments to support them in submitting their ASERAP applications.

Families with children under 18 or pregnant individual/couples that are not eligible for ASERAP may be eligible to apply for Emergency Rental Assistance Program administered by the Department of Housing (DOH) and Catholic Charities. Similarly, those households will be provided with six-months of rental assistance administered with housing location support and case management provided by Catholic Charities. On-site workshops are provided at shelters by a DOH delegate agency on how to find a rental unit, prepare to rent, budget, and navigate financial institutions.

The City may explore other short-term and long-term housing models and support systems, such as:

- Launching an educational campaign designed to encourage landlords and property owners to consider renting their available housing units to asylum seekers.

## + Employment

Asylum seekers are ready to work. They want to contribute, build community, and make a new home in the United States. The federal government must devote sufficient resources to achieve a 30-day mandated processing time for asylum seeker's initial Employment Authorization Document (EADs) applications. It will allow asylum seekers to work without the risk of exploitation or wage theft. Currently, there is a 150-day waiting period for an EAD for those who have asylum applications pending. This wait is much too long.

The City of Chicago and its partners must continue to:

- Encourage community-based organizations to introduce asylum seekers to other immigrant communities and support networks.
- Host Know Your City Rights and Workers' Rights presentations at shelters to ensure that asylum seekers know that regardless of their immigration status they have rights.
- Fund legal services since EAD eligibility is dependent upon immigration status.

## + Legal Services

The National Immigrant Justice Center played a critical role at the MARC. There, NIJC staff and other volunteer attorneys provided legal consultations to provide an overview of next steps, screenings, and legal information. To ensure that asylum seekers had continual access to this information, NIJC team produced orientation videos that provided a starting point to getting settled in the United States.

Ability to integrate and resettle quickly are largely dependent on the individual's immigration status. Without representation, the deck is stacked against an asylum seeker. Statistically, only one out of every ten individuals without an immigration attorney win their cases. With representation, nearly half are successful. That is why the City launched legal services to support the specific immigration needs of asylum seekers. Metropolitan Family Service's Legal Aid Society is the lead administrator tasked with ensuring that subgrantees successfully carry out intakes, pro se clinics, and full representation for asylum applicants.

**“Asylum seekers are ready to work. They want to contribute, build community, and make a new home in the United States.”**



Resettlement & Integration




## + Community Integration

Residents across the city have embraced the City's newest neighbors. For example, Nuevos Vecinos Group and Refugee Community Connection – community organization on the North and Northwest Side – ease the transition for newly arrived in Chicago by providing resources, information, food and clothing. They host several "Free Clothing Stores" and invite asylum seekers in neighboring shelters to shop for free while connecting with members of the community.

In the Woodlawn community, faith leaders are at the forefront of the community integration efforts. Concord Missionary Baptist Church opened their congregations for bilingual mass, ESL classes, and community building. Newly established, grassroots organizations like Chicago 4 All, Light of The World Church, and the City's Center for Community Safety Coordination Center (CCSC) coordinated a clean and green event to encourage current residents and asylum seekers to work together on beautification projects. In collaboration with Street Soccer USA and Cosmopolitan United Church, Chicago 4 All also organized soccer games to build connections through sports. The participation of community-based organizations and faith institutions are fundamental to integrate asylum seekers into the local communities.







## Section 3: The Next Step in the Journey







## Section 3: The Next Step in the Journey

The federal government used Title 42 public health order since 2020 to quickly expel migrants and deny entry to asylum seekers, in an attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19. With the end of the federal and state public health emergency, Title 42 ended on May 11. As a response to an influx of new arrivals at the southern border, the Biden administration issued new, overlapping immigration policies to border entries. With the lift of the order, the City of Chicago prepared for a surge in bus arrivals. As a Welcoming City, the City of Chicago will continue to respond to the needs of new arrivals as necessary, but this must continue to be done in collaboration with all government and community partners.

### Asylum Seekers Temporary Operations Lead

On January 30, 2023, Mayor Lightfoot detailed Andrew Velasquez III, First Deputy Aviation Commissioner to temporarily oversee the City's Asylum seekers Operation.

A crisis management veteran with 29 years of experience managing large, complex operations within the disciplines of law enforcement, emergency management, homeland security and aviation, First Deputy Velasquez stabilized operations by building an Incident Command structure for the mission; developed a surge plan in response to Title 42 termination; and ensured that asylum seekers continue the path to stability.

"It was an honor for me to join the team of individuals working tirelessly round-the-clock to lend my crisis management experience to help bring a level of stability to this on-going humanitarian crisis. Ensuring that asylum seekers were treated with dignity and respect was vital to the City efforts in Chicago." Andrew Velasquez III

## Federal Government Support Needed

The City recognizes that the work is far from over. Individuals will continue to arrive and may not always integrate into the City shelters. From the onset, the City and other receiving municipalities have advocated for more federal support to maintain this operation. Receiving cities need the federal government to step up to ensure a successful resettlement and better communication and coordination between border states and receiving cities. This requires a national solution.

The federal government can alleviate the strain felt by receiving municipalities through the following actions:

- **Commit to Comprehensive Immigration Reform.**

The City recognizes that Congress has failed for more than three decades to reform immigration, but there must be a rejuvenated call for comprehensive immigration reform. In the absence of that, as a welcoming city, Chicago will continue to respond accordingly and support the City's newest arrivals.

- **Expand DHS Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) and the Shelter and Services Program (SSP).**

In fiscal year 2023, Congress appropriated \$800M for the new SSP and to provide EFSP bridge funding while the SSP is established (an increase of over \$150M in FY22). As DHS establishes SSP, the City requests flexibility from EFSP's 30-day eligibility funding window, direct funding to local governments, improved transparency in funding decisions, funding of legal services, and to prohibiting funding for inhumane transport of individuals.

- **Expedite temporary Employment Authorization Documents (EAD).**

An individual who is not a citizen or a lawful permanent resident must have an EAD (i.e. work permit) to lawfully work. One can only receive an EAD from the federal government if they meet certain requirements. If an individual applies for asylum, they must wait 150 days before applying for an EAD.

Once eligible to work, they can begin making income and become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. Employment also provides a sense of belonging, a building of community, and purpose that allows asylum seekers to work through their hardships and experiences. The City urges the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to expedite EADs to help individuals and families stabilize quickly.

- **Expand Humanitarian Parole for two years.**

Most individuals were allowed into the U.S. under humanitarian parole. Parole allows them to apply for an employment authorization document. However, because most of the asylum seekers' parole is less than six months, they are not able to apply for an EAD. Expanding parole for two years creates an avenue for EAD eligibility as individuals determine next steps in their immigration journey.

- **Provide parolees with refugee resources.**

Unlike asylum seekers and most parolees, refugees receive assistance and services through the State Department-funded Reception and Placement Program. Through this program, a network of national resettlement agencies and their local affiliates aid with upfront expenses and help refugees enroll in employment services or school and apply for Social Security identification numbers, as well as connect them with a range of other services during their first 90 days of resettlement. Asylum seekers who are also fleeing violence and instability need similar support to stabilize and integrate into their new communities. The City encourages DHS to consider similar supports for asylum seekers both before and while their application is pending.

- **Waive filing fees** and expeditiously process humanitarian parole work permits and renewals in the backlog of applications.



## Maintaining Continuous Collaboration Across City and State

The City of Chicago thanks the State of Illinois, the Illinois General Assembly, and the Illinois Welcoming Centers for their commitment to this mission and for a historic collaboration. The City of Chicago, Cook County, and State of Illinois worked collaboratively across departments to ensure that asylum seekers were, for the first time in their trek, welcomed with respect. The State provided much-needed decompression of family shelters to hotels in the suburbs and in the city; supported logistics at the MARC; enrolled eligible individuals into public benefits programs; and coordinated transportation. On September 14, 2022, Governor JB Pritzker issued an emergency declaration to facilitate and expedite State resources to this operation. This additional financial support will prove critical in the months ahead as asylum seekers continue to arrive to the City.

The State can continue to support this operation by:

- **Providing additional funding to support shelter operations** including but not limited to staffing, food, and related services provided to asylum seekers.
- **Supporting other localities throughout the state** who express interest in welcoming migrants or who are already receiving an influx of asylum seekers.
- **Extending Governor J.B. Pritzker's state of emergency declaration** to ease restrictions on use of funds and allow more flexibility in supporting asylum seekers.



**“It was an honor for me** to join the team of individuals working tirelessly round-the-clock to lend my crisis management experience to help bring a level of stability to this on-going humanitarian crisis.”

★ Andrew Velasquez III, First Deputy Aviation Commissioner

## Conclusion

Chicago's long history of being a welcoming city can be seen all the way back to the 1800s when Jane Addams created Hull-House a space to greet new immigrants. Mayor Harold Washington built upon the legacy by issuing the first executive order officially establishing Chicago as a welcoming city. Under Mayor Lightfoot's leadership, the City not only spoke of its welcoming values but activated them to the fullest.

This report provides a glimpse of the several hours, days, weeks, and months that City staff and others spent to ensure that Chicago led with its values in response to this unprecedented humanitarian crisis. It tells the story of how the City responded, what was accomplished, the lessons learned, and the work that remains.

Chicago will continue to be a destination for asylum seekers, and other new arrivals, and the foundation laid over the past six months underscores the need for City to continue to lead in innovative ways to ensure Chicago's newest residents are supported and set up for success so that they may add to the rich history and cultural fabric of the Chicago story.

## Acknowledgments

Like the City's COVID-19 pandemic response, this mission required an all-government approach. Thank you to all the City staff, State and County officials, delegate agencies, faith leaders, community leaders and volunteers for an unwavering commitment to this mission.





## City of Chicago Agencies

- Chicago Animal Care Control
- Chicago Commission on Human Relations
- Chicago Department of Public Health
- Chicago Fire Department
- Chicago Park District
- Chicago Police Department
- Chicago Public Library
- Chicago Public Schools
- Chicago Transit Authority
- City Colleges of Chicago
- Civilian Office of Police Accountability
- Community Safety Coordination Center
- Department of Assets, Information and Services
- Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection
- Department of Family Support Services
- Department of Housing
- Department of Streets and Sanitation
- Department of Water Management
- Law Department
- Office of Budget and Management
- Office of the City Clerk
- Office Of Emergency Management and Communications

## Delegate Agencies

- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago
- Greater Chicago Food Depository
- National Immigrant Justice Center
- The Resurrection Project
- The Salvation Army

## Community-Based Organizations & Non-Governmental Organizations

- Another Chance Church
- Casa Michoacán
- Center for Changing Lives
- Centro de Trabajadores Unidos

- Centro Romero
- Chicago 4 All
- Chicago Loop Synagogue
- Coalition for Immigrant Mental Health
- Concord MB Church
- Cosmopolitan United Church
- Erie Neighborhood House
- Fourth Presbyterian Church
- Grace and Peace Church
- HANA Center
- Heartland Alliance Health
- Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Illinois Venezuelan Alliance
- Instituto del Progreso Latino
- Legal Aid Chicago
- Legal Aid Society
- Light of the World Church
- LUCHA
- Metropolitan Family Services
- Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors
- Northwest Center
- Nuevos Vecinos Group
- Onward Neighborhood House
- Pilsen Neighbors Community Council
- Refugee Community Connection
- Rincon Family Services
- Southwest Organizing Project
- Street Soccer USA
- The Helen and Joe Foundation
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness
- United African Organization
- University Cowork
- Welcome to IL Coalition
- YMCA

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