



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

207 STATE HOUSE
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62706

JB PRITZKER
GOVERNOR

October 2, 2023

President Biden,

In the 13 months since the first bus of asylum seekers arrived in Illinois from the border, our state has undertaken an unprecedented humanitarian response to the arrival of now over 15,000 people. Governors and mayors from border states have shipped people to our state like cargo in a dehumanizing attempt to score political points. The people of Illinois are kind and generous. We believe in the fundamental right of every human, especially those facing persecution, to find refuge and live with dignity in this great country of ours.

But as the numbers being transported to Chicago are accelerating, the humanitarian crisis is overwhelming our ability to provide aid to the refugee population. Unfortunately, the welcome and aid Illinois has been providing to these asylum seekers has not been matched with support by the federal government. Most critically, the federal government's lack of intervention and coordination at the border has created an untenable situation for Illinois.

On top of the 15,000 that have arrived in Chicago and Illinois over the last 13 months, we are now seeing busloads more migrants at increasingly higher rates being sent specifically to Chicago each day. Our state government has been forced to dedicate over \$330 million to provide humanitarian aid — and that amount is increasing each day. That's a massive amount of money for a state still overcoming the health and economic effects of COVID-19. Add to that the over \$100 million the city of Chicago contributed. Though we have found temporary housing in existing buildings for a majority of the refugees, we are challenged to find additional housing for the continuous flow of people who keep coming and are now forced to sleep in police stations and on sidewalks. This situation is untenable and requires your immediate help beyond the coming work authorizations for some of the asylum seekers.

There is much more that can and *must* be done on a federal level to address a national humanitarian crisis that is currently being shouldered by state and local governments without support.

First and foremost, I recommend that there be one person in the federal government who works directly for you in the White House who can lead the oversight of our nation's efforts at the border. Right now, we have too many different federal department contacts — who are uncoordinated with one another — that handle various programs related to this humanitarian crisis. A single office with an identified leader must be assigned to work for the cities and states across the silos of government to manage the challenges we all face.

For my state which has been targeted with busloads of asylum seekers by the border politicians seeking to increase the partisan divide, this crisis has strained the already stretched human services network we have attempted to rebuild in our recovery from the pandemic. As just one state in our union, we cannot lead coordination efforts at the border. It is time for the federal government to take a much more active role in managing the transport and destination of the transport of asylum seekers. Our nation is large and resourceful. Allowing just one state to lay the burden upon a certain few states run by Democrats is untenable. We are a nation that has welcomed immigrants and refugees since our founding, and we have done so in a bipartisan manner. It cannot be that just a few cities and states should now bear the cost of this effort alone.

Below is a list of specific requests to address this crisis without further delay. These actions include:

- **Waive fees for TPS applications**
 - I'm grateful that you have listened to some of the requests other governors and I have made over these many months. As you know, I remain deeply concerned that the high cost of applying for TPS is yet another obstacle for the population we have in Illinois. I urge you once again to waive those fees for those who cannot afford them and just want to be able to work and build a better life.

- **Significant increases in logistical coordination and data collection**
 - The federal government must take over the interior coordination of routing buses of newly arrived migrants across the country and oversee communication between states, so they are aware of who is arriving and when. The federal government must stop abdicating responsibility once CBP releases migrants into the interior of the country. Your administration has the capacity, resources and legal recourse to do this right now.
 - Currently, very little data is being made available to states on the migrants arriving in the country, making legal applications for asylum, extended parole, etc. difficult for advocates and government workers. There is no reason that the United States federal government should be unable to collect and share simple data on people presenting themselves at our border. Sending federal staff to Illinois and other affected states to provide data analytics and on the ground coordination between local city, state and federal agencies would massively streamline these processes.
 - Specifically, I am calling for a federal coordinator and task force based at the border that are solely dedicated to migrant coordination and resettlement.

- **Provide financial support to states, local governments, and NGOs for temporary housing, food and social services.**
 - The Biden administration has provided modest funding to Illinois through FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program and the Shelter and Services Program, which we are thankful for. However, this funding is not nearly enough to close the gap between what the state is able to provide and what is needed to address concerns. The burden of funding the state and city have taken on is not sustainable only by our budgets.
 - Unfortunately, Congress has long failed to provide the comprehensive immigration reform and funding resources necessary to tackle our nation's immigration issues.

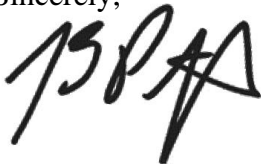
And with the Republican Conference currently fixated on deep, painful cuts to the federal budget, the chances of the hoped-for and much-needed financial aid seems slim to none. Which is why I urge you, President Biden, to look beyond the small set of programs that states and local governments can currently tap into for migrant-related response efforts and find additional federal dollars that can be sent to places, like Illinois, that are carrying out for our entire nation the obligations to care for the “huddled masses yearning to be free” who are so desperately in need of assistance.

- **Further accelerate the timeline for employment authorization**
 - While Illinois was among the many states thrilled to learn of the Administration’s new TPS rule for Venezuelans, it is our understanding that a large population of these newly TPS eligible individuals will potentially wait upwards of six-months to have their work authorizations processed and confirmed. We ask that the White House and the Administration continue to look for ways to “cut the red tape” and speed up the work authorization process by all means necessary including instituting a mass blanket fee waiver.

- **Approve Illinois’ requests for Medicaid waivers, housing vouchers, and federal coordination and support**
 - Illinois’ requests have been largely ignored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services as we continue to see wave after wave of asylum seekers. This is an untenable situation that has been exacerbated by a lack of federal action — forcing our state to bear an outsized burden and harming the people who fled to this nation in hopes of finding safety.

Today, Illinois stands mostly unsupported against this enormous strain on our state resources. Mr. President, I urge you, Secretary Mayorkas, and the rest of your administration to take swift action and intervene on our behalf and on behalf of the other affected states and their residents, as well as on behalf of the tens of thousands of asylum seekers who undertook a dangerous and difficult journey in hopes of attaining public safety and forging a better life for themselves and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JP', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Governor JB Pritzker