

# [***Florida Expands DeSantis Controversial Migrant Relocation Program***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67HR-PPP1-JBCM-F00N-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Brian Bushard, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-Fla.) is expected to sign the bill into law, extending Florida s migrant relocation program despite facing multiple lawsuits.

**Body**

**Topline**

Lawmakers in Florida on Friday approved a bill earmarking $10 million for a so-called migrant relocation program, as Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-Fla.) faces multiple lawsuits for chartering two flights carrying Venezuelan migrants from Texas to Martha s Vineyard in a controversial program that s been criticized for misleading migrants.

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Florida lawmakers approved a bill to extend Gov. Ron DeSantis' migrant relocation program.

Getty Images

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**Key Facts**

The bill, which DeSantis is expected to sign, creates the so-called Unauthorized Alien Transport Program, extending a state program to send undocumented migrants to northern Democrat-led states.

It comes five months after DeSantistook creditfor sending 50 Venezuelan migrants on charter flights from San Antonio, through Florida, and ultimately to Martha s Vineyard, where local officials were not aware they would be receiving migrants, who themselves were unaware they would be traveling to an island off the coast of Cape Cod.

Unlike the initial program, however, the newbillallows the state to send migrants directly from border states, giving DeSantis more flexibility to contract transportation companies to fly migrants directly from places like Texas.

Republicans have argued the program is necessary to combat the border crisis, with Florida state Rep. Paul Renner (R)tweetingit has never been more necessary because the Biden Administration has failed to secure our borders, and state Rep. John Snyder (R)callingit a humanitarian way of sending migrants on free chartered flights.

According to the bill, the program is necessary to avoid increased crime, diminished economic opportunities and wages for American workers in Florida.

**Chief Critic**

Despiteexperts having foundthat DeSantis plan to send migrants to northern states was not a violation of federal smuggling laws, the Florida governor and 2024 GOP presidential hopeful has faced heavy criticism from the left, with President Joe Bidenaccusinghim of playing ***politics*** with human beings. Last October, the Florida watchdog group Center for Government Accountabilitysued Desantis officeover allegations it withheld public documents on its flights from San Antonio, through Florida, to Martha s Vineyard. Florida state Sen. Jason Pizzo (D) also filed a lawsuit against DeSantis over the state s use of taxpayer dollars to fund private transportation of unauthorized aliens that was inconsistent with federal law, while a group of Venezuelan migrants flown to Massachusetts filed aclass-action suitagainst DeSantis and Florida Transportation Secretary Jared Purdue, arguing they were flown under false pretenses. On top of that, Texas Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar last September launched acriminal investigationinto the flights to determine if any other laws were broken.

**Surprising Fact**

Migrants arriving in Martha s Vineyard said they were lured by a mysterious blonde woman in San Antonio whocalled herself Perla and offered jobs, McDonald s gift cards, a free flight, place to live and as much as $200 to recruit other migrants to board the flight, which she said would take them to a sanctuary state. The woman was lateridentifiedas Perla Huerta andnamedin the migrants class-action lawsuit.

**What We Don t Know**

Where migrants could be sent and when. The $10 million earmarked through the state Division of Emergency Management is set to expire at the end of the next fiscal year, in June 2025. Late last year, speculation grew that Illinois and Biden s home state of Delaware could be the next targets in DeSantis program, after the CEO of a private transportation firm contracted for the flightssent a letterto Florida officials, saying it was looking to send 50 migrants to each state, thereported. Officials on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts where Biden typically spends his Thanksgiving warnedthat the island could be next, after staff at Nantucket Memorial Airport received notice that the same charter company had flights scheduled to land on the island although they arrived carrying business workers.

**Further Reading**

DeSantis Claims Credit As Dozens Of Venezuelan Migrants Arrive On Martha s Vineyard(Forbes)

DeSantis Tactic Of Sending Migrants To Martha s Vineyard Likely Didn t Violate Smuggling Laws, Experts Say(Forbes)

DeSantis Sued By Florida Watchdog Group Here s All The Legal Fallout He Faces For Flying Migrants To Martha s Vineyard(Forbes)

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