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W E D N E S D A Y , A U G U S T 1 4 , 2 0 2 4

What

the state

won't

say

about the

shelter crisis

Healey administration withholds key information about hotel contracts and conditions, citing fears of antimigrant protests

By Stephanie Ebbert
and Deirdre Fernandes

GLOBE STAFF

In August 2023, a state housing official signed a contract to rent 149 hotel rooms to homeless families at taxpayer expense. With a spiraling homeless crisis, an influx of migrants, and the state's shelters past capacity, the urgency was clear: The state agreed to spend \$16.3 million at the hotel through the end of June — \$400,000 of it before the deal was even finalized.

Who got paid?

The state won't say.

The contract, one of many The Boston Globe requested last spring to examine how the state is spending about \$1 billion a year on emergency shelters, was provided in July with the name of the vendor blacked out. The secrecy is extreme even in Massachusetts, a state

600
serious
incidents

have been reported to the state by providers who run the shelters since January 2023.

40
complaints

have been submitted by shelter families and staff since January 2023.

with a poor track record of providing government records for public scrutiny.

Governor Maura Healey's administration has broken with government accountability norms by withholding key information about some contractors and has shuttered the shelters from public view, even as the state tripled its spending on migrant and homeless family services. Without transparency, it is difficult if not impossible for watchdogs to ensure that taxpayer money isn't wasted and to verify that vulnerable families are safely housed and getting appropriate care.

Reporters and photographers have only been allowed at shelters on select occasions. Contracts bar vendors from speaking directly to the media about the shelter program, requiring that all inquiries go through state agencies. Providers who run the shelters have

SHELTERS, Page A8

Campus
protesters
see future
in socialism

Pro-Palestinian
groups have more
on their minds

By Hilary Burns

GLOBE STAFF

NORTHAMPTON — The pro-Palestinian organizers gathered for “coffee with comrades” on a recent muggy morning in the middle of Pulas-ki Park in Northampton, though most reached for water bottles rather than a hot cup of Dunkin'. The 20 or so graduate students and community members in the group were reminded to use the communal sunscreen throughout the day of “summer camp,” before organizers rolled in a white board with a Palestinian flag draped over the side.

The main speaker, a University of Massachusetts Amherst PhD candidate, took the stage. He donned a keffiyeh and a Cuban Communist Party cap emblazoned with a red star, and began discussing readings by Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Leila Khaled, a former Palestinian militant and first woman to hijack an airplane.

“Our political system is falling apart,” William Chaney, the PhD candidate, said in an interview just before his lecture began. “If we want to leave the world better, we have to look

NORTHAMPTON, Page A5

‘I don’t even have a full refrigerator shelf to myself.’

SARAH ROUSE, *who shares an apartment with four roommates*

The more the cheaper: Young adults get creative to afford rent

By Madison Hahamy

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Alula Hunsen, 24, lives in a six-bedroom apartment in Allston. He and his five roommates share the space, which has only two bathrooms and one kitchen, not because they hate having privacy, but because Boston is crazy expensive, he said.

“Affordability is really the only reason that I'm living in this configuration,” said Hunsen, a writer and MIT graduate student.

With the cost of living skyrocketing in Massachusetts, more renters said they have no choice but to reside with more and more people if they want to stay in the city, where

they can be closer to their jobs, friends, and a vibrant social scene. With a recent study showing Massachusetts now has the highest cost of living on the mainland United States, for some locals that means having four, five, six, or even more roommates to be able to make rent.

The current average rent for a studio apartment in Boston is \$2,350, while a one-bedroom is \$2,750, according to Apartment Advisor, a Cambridge-based apartment-search platform. The more bedrooms you add, the more the average price decreases: about \$1,700 per person for a two-bedroom apartment and \$1,400 per person for a three-bedroom.

It's an equation that many young Bostonians said is increasingly appealing in a housing market that is brutal for homeowners and renters alike. Boston Pads, an online real estate marketplace, said in a February report that renters across the city “appear to be gravitating towards shared spaces where they can reduce their overall living costs as opposed to renting a smaller unit for a higher price.”

Though more affordable, living with large numbers of people comes with challenges for some.

Hunsen said he pays about \$1,000 per month for both rent and utilities, which he said allows for

ROOMMATES, Page A7

Arizona voters will decide in November whether to establish a right to abortion in the state constitution, a measure that could influence turnout in a battleground state. **A2.**

Documents reveal the Israeli government gave new stipulations to the mediators working on a cease-fire deal in the Gaza Strip. **A3.**

A leader of the West

Springfield trucking company involved in a 2019 crash that killed seven motorcyclists pleaded guilty to federal charges, marking the first criminal conviction in the case. **B1.**

Cannabis Control Commission acting chair Ava Callender Concepcion, who is pregnant, will take medical leave for at least the next month, adding to a spate of key vacancies. **B5.**

Tomato time

For lovers of the seasonal fruit, this is the best time of the year. Food, **G1.**

High time for lawn and order

Wednesday: Some sun. High: 79-84. Low: 65-70.

Thursday: Showers. High: 74-79. Low: 64-69.

High tide: 7:02 a.m. 7:15 p.m.

Sunrise: 5:51 Sunset: 7:46

Comics and Weather, **G6-7.** Obituaries, **C11.**

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Evictions
rising at
sites for
families

Quincy church removes
tents after city cites
potential code violations

By Danny McDonald

GLOBE STAFF

As the number of evictions at overflow shelters in Massachusetts continues to climb, a church in Quincy has removed tents that advocates had set up for migrants after city officials said there were numerous potential code violations at the encampment.

The encampment at Faith Lutheran Church was removed on Friday, which also marked the first day migrant and other homeless families could be evicted under new limitations the state imposed at its four overflow shelters. State officials have said the evictions are necessary to make room for other families waiting for space.

The Quincy development comes as the number of eviction notices given to families staying at overflow shelters in Massachusetts more than doubled in recent days, from 57 to 128, state authorities said Tuesday. Some have been given a last-minute reprieves, but so far, 18 families have left the overflow shelters, either for alternative ac-

MIGRANTS, Page A7



ANDREW BURKE-STEVENSON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Kim White worked in her home office with the lights off to save on the cost of electricity.

Sweating
the cost of
electricity

In hot, humid summer,
some see bills nearly triple

By Jeremy C. Fox and Ken Mahan

GLOBE STAFF

and Camilo Fonseca

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

These days, Kim White sits in a dark home office as she works from her South Boston apartment, after getting a July electric bill that was nearly triple her June bill.

“Now I'm forcing me and my husband to be a lot more cautious,” said White, 36. “On the weekends, I'm making sure we shut down all of our computers, unplug things, because I don't want to be accidentally using more electricity.”

After seeing their energy use jump from 497 kilowatt hours in June to 1,363 in July, White said, she joined the growing ranks of residents in Greater Boston who are unplugging appliances, turning off lights, and limiting air conditioner use when they can to keep electric bills down.

Their goal is to be able to crank the air-conditioning. **ELECTRICITY, Page A7**