

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2024

## Mayor's Newton Update

This afternoon Our Lady Help of Christians Parish and Catholic Charities released the following statement about operating a safety-net overflow shelter on their Washington Street campus in Nonantum.

*For over thirty years Our Lady Help of Christians Parish has provided space within its campus for emergency housing for those most in need, mostly women in recovery from addiction or fleeing domestic violence with their children. Due to programmatic changes, two shelter locations became vacant last fall shortly after the governor declared a state of emergency and capped the state's available shelter beds.*

*Catholic Charities has been a longtime provider of emergency family shelters for the state, stabilizing families and empowering their upward growth and mobility. They have been a tenant here on the campus for over 30 years doing God's work. They approached the parish and asked if they could use the spaces for overflow temporary stays for the most vulnerable families. The SafetyNet program is administered through the United Way and is available to families who are struggling including those here legally seeking refuge from persecution, war and deadly environmental conditions. There is no doubt the need is great - and Cardinal Séan O'Malley has urged parishes to respond "generously and effectively" and I am proud to say, we have.*

*Since November our site has operated as a SafetyNet shelter which serves up to 30 families at a time and will continue to do so through May of this year. The children of these families are not enrolled in local schools as this is a temporary shelter for them as they await placement in more permanent housing. The children range from 10 months up to 8 years old.*

*Catholic Charities has a policy to not disclose the locations of emergency shelter sites to protect clients and staff. Just this past fall, Catholic Charities USA warned member agencies they are being targeted by those who want to harm to our volunteers, residents, and staff across the country for helping migrants with basic needs. You may notice we have private security on site, and they are there for the safety of our staff and residents - not for any perceived risk to our parish community or neighbors. We do regret that some of the young children staying at this site tested our fire alarms a few times which caused unnecessary response and disturbance. However, other reports of violence at this site are not accurate and we caution those who don't know the facts from sharing rumors that could cause an unfortunate portrayal of the families we are caring for in our community. The families here are in need of our help, not condemnation. We consider these families people not problems.*

*We hope that during this time of reflection and while you consider your Lenten commitments you may open your hearts to help those here who are seeking refuge and comfort. The archdiocese has designated the Ash Wednesday collection for Catholic Charities so please offer any support you can and keep these families, especially the small children, in your prayers.*

To provide further context, in November last year, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) and United Way of Massachusetts Bay partnered on an emergency program to provide grants to non-profits to establish a temporary network of short term, immediate response “safety-net shelters” sites directly managed by community-based organizations.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been desperately working to find safe indoor spaces to temporarily accommodate homeless families, many of whom are new arrivals to our country. The state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter program is operating at capacity, and eligible families who cannot be immediately placed into shelter are placed on a waitlist. The Healey-Driscoll Administration has worked to establish overflow shelter sites to provide temporary shelter to families who are on the waitlist but have no safe alternative place to stay. As an example, just recently Governor Healey established a temporary safety-net overflow shelter at a recreational center in Roxbury.

In mid-December, we learned that one such safety-net shelter site had opened here in Newton before Thanksgiving.

As described above, the site is operated by Catholic Charities and provides approximately 30 bedrooms for short-term stays, allowing for temporary shelter for families before they are relocated to more permanent shelter locations across the state. The building in which the shelter is operating had previously served for over 30 years as a family shelter for women and children. The shelter is staffed by Catholic Charities on a 24/7 basis and includes 24-hour security personnel. Due to the short-term nature of this transitional stay, children are not enrolled in the Newton Public Schools. The shelter is slated to operate through May 2024.

Rather than disclose the location, Catholic Charities, Our Lady’s and the State EOHLC, who in the fall/early winter had seen protests and threats aimed at shelter residents and workers at several locations in the Commonwealth, asked the City not to release any information about this shelter and rather to keep it as an undisclosed location. The family shelter that had operated in this location for decades had also been operated as an undisclosed location. Until the release today by Our Lady’s and Catholic Charities, we honored their request.

Please be assured that we have been in close contact with Catholic Charities and Our Lady’s on the ongoing operation of the shelter. Our Police, Fire, Inspectional Services and Health & Human Services teams continue to be in communication with the shelter staff.

Catholic Charities and Our Lady’s have requested that inquiries about their Newton safety-net shelter be directed to [info@ccab.org](mailto:info@ccab.org). If you are interested in

helping, you may want to explore the [Massachusetts Migrant Families Relief Fund](#).

I'm thankful that at such a difficult time in their lives, these families have a tremendous team supporting them in Catholic Charities, Our Lady's, and the State EOHLIC. I fully support the essential work of helping children and parents who are on the frontline of this humanitarian crisis.



Warmly,  
Ruthanne



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