

Gov. Pritzker Announces Additional Investments To Provide Food To Asylum Seekers

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CHICAGO - Building on the State's data-driven plan to improve the asylum seeker response, Governor JB Pritzker, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and the Greater Chicago Food Depository announced an additional \$4 million investment to provide meals to asylum seekers through the end of the calendar year. The additional \$2 million state investment will be matched by philanthropy through the Food Depository.

At the request of the City of Chicago in June 2023, the State has provided \$10.5 million in funding to the Greater Chicago Food Depository, a food bank with a network of community-based providers, to deliver meals to asylum seekers while the City worked

to procure additional vendors. Due to delays in the procurement process, the State and Food Depository will now contribute an additional \$2 million each, to ensure asylum seekers are fed through the month of December. In January, the City of Chicago will assume this responsibility as the State ramps up its shelter, resettlement, and Temporary Protected Status and Employee Authorization Document efforts. The State will also provide the meals at the recently announced shelter sites in Brighton Park and Little Village, which will house up to 2,200 people at full capacity.

“In Illinois – we welcome asylum seeking families with dignity and that means ensuring they don’t go hungry,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “The State is continuing to make strategic investments in the absence of the resources and coordination we continue to advocate for from Congress and the federal government.”

This \$2 million investment from the State builds on Governor Pritzker’s recently announced \$160 million investment, via IDHS, to improve the asylum-seeker path to self-sufficiency, as well as the \$478 million in State funding that has been allocated to the asylum seeker response over Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024.

Before this latest investment, the State provided \$10.5 million in funding for food for new arrivals, bringing the total now to \$12.5 million. The State began partnering with the Greater Chicago Food Depository for this purpose in June 2023.

“I am grateful to the Greater Chicago Food Depository for continuously meeting this need,” said Dulce Quintero, IDHS Secretary Designate. “The Depository has been an invaluable partner to the State as we continue to address this humanitarian crisis.”

“The Greater Chicago Food Depository believes food is a basic human right. It is a privilege to provide daily meals for asylum seeking new arrivals in our community while continuing our work of serving anyone in need of food across Chicago and Cook County,” said Kate Maehr, Executive Director and CEO of the Food Depository. “Our response for new arrivals has been bolstered by support from the state of Illinois and the generosity of private philanthropy. We are incredibly grateful that the State of Illinois has stepped up again and again this year to protect residents from hunger, both lifelong Illinoisans and our newest neighbors.”

The Greater Chicago Food Depository has worked with the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago to provide food for asylum seeking new arrivals since Texas began busing them to Illinois last summer. This year, the Food Depository’s response has expanded to include daily lunch and dinner, fresh fruit, breakfast items, and hygiene essentials at shelters and police stations across Chicago. The Food Depository’s response has been funded by critical investments from the State of Illinois and generous contributions from private donors.

To supply meals for new arrivals, the Food Depository has been working in partnership with more than 15 minority-owned restaurants and caterers based in neighborhoods across Chicago. By contracting with these local businesses, the Food Depository is supplying up to 20,000 nourishing and culturally affirming meals each day, while investing millions of dollars back into the local community – creating economic impact and jobs for Chicagoans. The response serves as a model of how to address hunger while also guiding funds and resources to neighborhoods that have endured historic disinvestment.

In addition to the increased investment for food, the State of Illinois is also making targeted, data-driven investments to alleviate bottlenecks in the asylum seeker pipeline. Those investments are as follows:

1. WELCOME: \$30 million to stand up a large intake center and deploy a welcome team to better support those coming to Chicago who are seeking an alternative final destination, or who have sponsors in Illinois and don't require shelter. With this approach, data indicates the number of new arrivals requiring shelter can be reduced by 10%.
2. SHELTER: \$65 million to stand up and contract operations for two shelters as a part of the existing City of Chicago shelter system. New Life Centers of Chicagoland will provide on the ground support, including quality assurance and community-care services, like conflict resolution, onsite communications, community engagement, and connection with local resources.
3. INDEPENDENCE: \$65 million in increased funding to expand the wraparound services the State currently provides at City shelters which enable new arrivals to live independently as they await asylum hearings, including case management, housing assistance, legal services, work permit processing, and workforce development support. The State will continue to provide the rental assistance that allows asylum seekers to transition from shelters to independent living.