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## *Frequently Asked Questions for Sheltering Unaccompanied Children July 18, 2014*

Governor Patrick has announced that Massachusetts has proposed two locations to the federal government to shelter unaccompanied children impacted by the humanitarian crisis at the southern border – Camp Edwards at Joint Base Cape Cod in Bourne and Westover Air Reserve Base in Chicopee. These potential locations will be vetted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for suitability before the federal government decides if one of these sites meets the needs of children requiring shelter.

### ***Q: Who is paying for this?***

A: If a temporary facility opens in Massachusetts, the federal government is funding all aspects of this facility and its operations.

### ***Q: How long will these kids be in Massachusetts?***

A: If a temporary facility opens in Massachusetts, these unaccompanied children will be sheltered there temporarily while they are being processed by federal immigration officials for deportation, reunification or asylum under federal law. Federal officials will schedule children to appear before federal immigration judges. Based on experience elsewhere, the average stay for a child is 35 days.

### ***Q: When will this decision be made?***

A: We don't have a timeline from the federal government, but we know that there is a sense of urgency. We know that federal HHS has an extensive process to go through to ensure that a location is appropriate before something opens.

**Q: What will this federal assessment process look like?**

A: The federal government will assess our proposed locations for their suitability to safely and appropriately house children in a secure environment.

**Q: Why are we giving the federal government two facilities to consider?**

A: We are giving federal officials two options so that they can assess which facility best meets the children's needs and make a decision based on that assessment - if a Massachusetts facility is deemed to be appropriate for these purposes.

**Q: Will one or both sites be selected?**

A: Only one site will be selected, if a facility is located in Massachusetts.

**Q: What happens when these kids leave the facility? Are they deported?**

A: If a temporary facility opens in Massachusetts, these unaccompanied children will be sheltered there while they are being processed by federal immigration officials for deportation, reunification or asylum under federal law. Federal officials will schedule children to appear before federal immigration judges.

**Q: How can we be sure this won't be an endless situation? What guarantees do we have from the feds about payment, local control, etc.?**

A: Before any temporary facility opens here, the Commonwealth will sign an MOU with the federal government to ensure that, among other things, the state will not be responsible for the costs of the facility, and to ensure that municipality hosting the facility has input on the circumstances of being a host location. The MOU will state a period of time that the facility will be open, and the conditions to which any extension would be subject.

**Q: These children already tried to illegally enter the country once, how do we know they won't try to leave the facility and make their way into the country?**

A: If a temporary facility opens in Massachusetts, it will be secured, and will be controlled by federal immigration officials.

***Q: We don't have an international border - why is this Massachusetts' problem?***

A: This is a national problem, and Massachusetts has a proud tradition of stepping up in the face of national problems. We have an opportunity to do that again for these children, many of whom have experienced great traumas in their home country as well as on their journey to America.

***Q: We have so many issues here in Massachusetts that need attention. Why are we taking on someone else's problem?***

A: This is a national problem, and Massachusetts has a proud tradition of stepping up in the face of national problems. We have an opportunity to do that again for these children, many of whom have experienced great traumas in their home country as well as on their journey to America. We remain committed to facing our own challenges here in the Commonwealth, and have a strong record of doing so.

***Q: Why are we helping homeless undocumented immigrants before we help the children and families here in Massachusetts that are homeless?***

A: We remain committed to facing our own challenges here in the Commonwealth, and have a strong record of doing so. That is our first responsibility. In this case, we have been asked to make available Commonwealth facilities at federal expense to help address a national problem, and we have the capacity to do so.

***Q: What will this look like for the towns hosting these facilities?***

A: Students from these federal facilities will not be attending local public schools during their short-term period of sheltering. The federal government is handling other logistics at these facilities as well.

***Q: Do the towns have any say over whether or not these facilities open in their backyards?***

A: Before a facility opens here, the Commonwealth will sign an MOU with the federal government to ensure that a municipality hosting the facility has input on the circumstances of being a host location.

***Q: How will the kids get to the facility in Massachusetts if we are selected?***

A: The safe transport of these children to and from a potential facility in Massachusetts is the responsibility of the federal government.

***Q: Are there health risks to having these kids in Massachusetts? Are they vaccinated?***

A: The health and wellness of these children is essential, both for their well-being and for the health and security of the facility's host community. All children, no matter what state they are ultimately sheltered in, will receive medical screenings before entering the Commonwealth, which will include all essential vaccines. Children at the facility will have access to medical care, paid for by the federal government, to address any health issues that arise while a child is being sheltered at the facility. Additionally, U.S. Border Patrol has medical units at its busiest border stations and conducts initial public health screens on all incoming individuals.

***Q: Who will staff these facilities? How will they be paid? Are they screened/trained?***

A: It is essential that appropriate, highly-qualified staff care for these children. If a temporary facility opens in Massachusetts, the federal government will provide and fund all staff and contractors, and will ensure that necessary screenings have been conducted for all employees to make certain that children at this facility are kept safe.

***Q: How can people help these kids?***

A: We have seen first-hand the generous spirit and compassionate heart that this state brings to a crisis – our ability to turn to each other and not on each other. There is no doubt that we will rise to this occasion and will do what we can to help these children through their time of crisis. We are working with non-profits and the faith-based community on this front. Individuals who are interested in making a donation or volunteering should contact the Governor's office, and we will forward them to the appropriate relief agencies.

***Q: What about protesters?***

A: It is our sincere hope that the people of Massachusetts will see this as the humanitarian crisis that it is. These are children who have experienced great trauma in their home country and on their journey to America, and who have been separated from their families. While we realize that there are difference of opinion on the issues surrounding how and why these children came to the United States, we are confident that we can look past our differences and respond with love and kindness to these hurting children, as we have seen the people of the Commonwealth do so many times before.

***Q: The pictures from other states look like the kids are being kept in horrible conditions. Will that be happening here?***

A: While this will be a federally-operated temporary facility, we have made clear that Massachusetts will only participate if we can be assured that the children sheltered here will be provided with appropriate living conditions. Additionally, we have reached out to the non-profit and faith-based communities to see how we may engage the generous people of the Commonwealth looking to assist these children.

***Q: How many other states are sheltering these children?***

A: We do not have definitive numbers of states that have also agreed to assist with this crisis, though we know anecdotally that California, Oklahoma and Texas have certainly been involved.

***Q: What has their experience been?***

A: We have not spoken to all participating states, but California and Oklahoma have provided very positive feedback. Children are medically screened and immunized during initial processing in Arizona prior to being sent to the facilities in California. The facility in California provides a comprehensive system of wrap around services including health care, education, recreation and religion. The children have access to educational classes that cover math, history, ESL and science. They can also participate in art classes and recreational activities, such sports.

***Q: Was Massachusetts asked to take these kids, or did you volunteer?***

A: The federal government reached out to governors across the country to help respond to this humanitarian crisis. After careful thought and consideration, we felt strongly that we needed to act to provide these children with safety and stability during this challenging time.