

Chicago seeks help as Texas buses over migrants

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Migrants and asylum seekers wait in line to board a bus to New York City in El Paso, Texas [File: Paul Ratje/Reuters]

Chicago, September 7 (RHC)-- A political battle over the immigration policies of US President Joe Biden's administration has expanded in recent days, with officials in Chicago asking for volunteers and donations to assist with asylum seekers being bused into the city from Texas.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot recently told reporters that about 125 migrants have arrived in the city on board buses from Texas, including 50 people who arrived on Sunday alone, most of them families.

“We’re a welcoming city, so we’re always gonna step up and do the right thing to make sure that migrants who are coming here to our city are well received,” Lightfoot said during a news conference on Sunday evening. The mayor said Chicago had not yet heard from any Texas officials and urged the state’s Republican governor, Greg Abbott, to collaborate on a more humane treatment of the asylum seekers and migrants.

“My frustration comes from the actions of the governor of Texas,” Lightfoot said. “There could be a level of coordination and cooperation but he chooses to do none of these things.”

Political tensions have increased over the growing number of asylum seekers arriving at the United States-Mexico border. Abbott, who is seeking a third term in office in the November midterm elections, has seized on the issue of record-high arrivals at the border to boost his campaign.

Since April, Texas has bused more than 7,000 asylum seekers and migrants to Washington, DC, and New York City, and last week, Abbott began sending buses to Chicago. He says more cities could be added to the list and that the buses are needed because the Biden administration has failed to effectively secure the border.

The Democratic mayors of Washington, DC, and New York City have denounced the move and called on the federal government to help. Lightfoot said several aid organisations in Chicago have stepped in and started providing assistance. “He [Abbott] tries to send human beings — not cargo, not freight, but human beings — across the country to an uncertain destination,” Lightfoot said. “He is manufacturing a human crisis and it makes no sense to me.”

Chicago has launched a new website urging residents to donate items to help the new arrivals, including toothpaste, toothbrushes and other toiletries; diapers; blankets; baby formula, and Spanish-language books for children, among other things.

“We anticipate that the state of Texas will continue to bus migrants to Chicago and we remain committed to providing support and resources to our newly arrived neighbors during this transition period,” the website reads.

Chicago is a so-called “Sanctuary City” -- which means that city officials will not ask residents about their immigration status or deny them services on the basis of that status, nor will they share such information with federal immigration authorities (PDF). The U.S. has used a pandemic restriction known as “Title 42” to expel most asylum seekers who arrive at the country’s southern border back to Mexico or to their country of origin.

Approximately 2 million Title 42 expulsions were carried out between October 1, 2021, and the end of July this year, according to statistics from U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The numbers include repeat crossers.

Abbott is busing refugees and migrants out of Texas as part of a strategy to share the burden with liberal cities. According to the Texas Tribune, Texas has so far spent nearly \$13m on the effort.

The Republican governor of Arizona, Doug Ducey, has also been sending buses to Washington, DC, and New York City. Many of the asylum seekers and migrants being bused come from Venezuela, Haiti, Cuba and Nicaragua, as well as other countries. Many are travelling with small children and have struggled to secure permanent housing, access education and receive medical care, volunteers have said.



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