



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPRESENTATIVE SIMON CATALDO

*14th Middlesex*

February 27, 2023

On Friday afternoon, I met with Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) staff members, officials from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Senator Mike Barrett, Superintendent Laurie Hunter, and Town of Concord officials to discuss DHCD's plans to use the Best Western in Concord as an emergency family shelter. I also recently visited the emergency family intake site currently in operation in Devens, which DHCD plans to close once the Best Western site is operating. The below information is based on my recent discussions with DHCD and my visit to Devens, and supplements my [February 8 letter](#) on the same topic, as well as the [Town of Concord's FAQ](#), which was recently updated.

## **New Information Concerning the Best Western**

At this time, DHCD plans to use up to approximately 50 of the Best Western's 105 rooms for homeless families entering the emergency assistance system. The remaining rooms will be dedicated to two purposes. *First*, to accommodate the current long-term residents of the Best Western. I am in direct contact with most of these residents, and I am monitoring their situations to ensure that they are treated in a fair manner. *Second*, some of the remaining rooms will be used for the on-site service agency's (Making Opportunities Count, or "MOC") supplies, staff, and operations.

The arrival of families has been delayed to at least March 13, 2023. DHCD's current plan is to use the Best Western as an emergency intake site for families, meaning that the stay will be 3 to 5 business days. In that scenario, students would not enter the Concord school system. However, DHCD is also exploring the potential for longer family stays at the Best Western, meaning that students living at the Best Western would attend Concord schools and, in some cases, be transported to their home school sites. Occupancy of more than 50 rooms could also accompany longer stays. During Friday's meeting, the Town, school district, and legislative delegation emphasized the importance of advance notice to the extent feasible should DHCD decide to use the site for longer stays.

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### **Devens**

When I visited Devens, there were 20 families (comprising 69 individuals) staying there. Each of these families entered the emergency assistance system by seeking shelter at a Massachusetts state-run facility such as a hospital or human services agency. The families included two parent families, single dads, and single moms. Most of the children I saw had not yet reached school age, and some were babies who were still nursing. According to DHCD, this is consistent with the age makeup of children arriving at Devens since the site began operations.

The sleeping arrangements consisted of cots, with little separation between them, in an open ballroom. A few hundred feet away, port-a-potties equipped with showers had been set up for use by the families. MOC provides the families with three meals a day. The facility is staffed 24/7 with between 4 to 8 on-site service providers (nurses, social workers, administrators, etc.), and between 4 to 8 security personnel. The emergency assistance intake process includes background checks.

I left my visit to Devens with a strong feeling that the Best Western, notwithstanding the significant concerns that many of us have about the suitability of this location for this purpose, is a far more humane option for vulnerable families seeking shelter. I am also mindful of DHCD's advisements about the limited options for this type of facility, and the challenges it faces finding hotel owners willing to open their hotels to homeless families. I know from my colleagues in the legislature that DHCD has plans to open and build additional emergency family shelter sites in other districts, including long-term shelters. Concord residents should understand that identification by DHCD of other hotels willing to enter a contract for emergency family stays is likely to lead to additional sites, rather than a replacement of the Best Western.

DHCD's plan for the Best Western is part of a statewide response to an urgent housing crisis that is occurring in the backdrop of a [declining population in Massachusetts](#). Working class and low-income people, from young families to seniors, are increasingly unable to afford to live in our region. I hope that the arrival of families to the Best Western invigorates discussions about how our community can address the

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housing shortage. In rising to that challenge, we will protect and uplift our ideals as a welcoming community that prides itself as being on the vanguard of emerging social and economic issues.

### **Local Assistance for Families Staying at the Best Western**

Many residents have reached out seeking ways to support the families who will soon arrive at the Best Western. I am in touch with the Town of Concord social worker, local community groups, and MOC to consolidate information and collaborate on ways to support the families who will soon be staying in our community.

If you would like to be notified when more guidance about helping families at the Best Western is available, please email me and I'll place you on any distribution list that is created. Meanwhile, if you are eager to help families in our area who are experiencing housing insecurity, food insecurity, or related challenges, I urge you to support any of the wonderful local organizations engaged in that work. All of them can use your help without delay. A non-exclusive list includes the Concord-Carlisle Community Chest, Open Table, Gaining Ground, MetroWest Legal Services, and the Hugh Cargill Trust.

Sincerely,

Simon Cataldo  
State Representative, 14<sup>th</sup> Middlesex District