

## Report from News on current San Antonio Migrant situation:

When hundreds of migrants began arriving in San Antonio in late March, the city opened a small “resource center” across from the Greyhound station to feed, clothe and provide medical care to the asylum-seekers.

City workers and multiple nonprofits pitched in, donating hundreds of volunteer hours and services for the ’round-the-clock operation.

The city has assisted 8,000 migrants so far in what was expected to be a temporary operation.

Now, with thousands of more migrants expected to arrive as the border surge continues, officials are asking the City Council for an infusion of up \$141,000 to offset some of the nonprofits’ expenses.

“What started as a collaborative effort to address a short-term situation has now escalated to a longer-term problem,” City Manager Erik Walsh said in a memo Wednesday to the mayor and council.

The resource center, opened in a vacant building, has been helping 200 to 250 migrants every day, from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. The nearby Travis Park Church has been housing the migrants overnight.

Mayor Ron Nirenberg said assisting the migrants is “the right thing to do.”

“San Antonio is a compassionate city that supports the most vulnerable among us, including legal asylum-seekers,” he said. “When people need help, our community steps up.”

The effort is reminiscent of San Antonio’s response after Hurricane Katrina flooded New Orleans in 2005. The city then opened large temporary shelters at Port San Antonio and the old Windsor Park Mall that housed ten of thousands of refugees.

The last-minute request Wednesday to the City Council came after U.S. Customs and Border Protection told the city this week it can expect more migrants to arrive, prompting the decision to seek funding. Walsh expects the influx to last at least until this fall.

“San Antonio has become a de facto federal border center because we are receiving all asylum-seekers released from Eagle Pass and Del Rio,” he said.

Walsh is asking the council to provide \$86,000 for Catholic Charities, the San Antonio Food Bank and Travis Park Church through the end of June, and up to \$55,000 that would match community donations. The council will consider the request today.

City officials will seek federal reimbursement for the expenses, Walsh said in the memo.

In less than two months of operation, local nonprofits and city agencies have contributed more than \$100,000 worth of services. The breakdown:

»The San Antonio Food Bank provided 11,000 meals worth \$35,000, and \$10,000 worth of water, clothes, diapers and other toiletries.

»Catholic Charities has spent \$117,000 on bus tickets and hotel rooms for migrants.

»Metro Health, volunteer doctors and the San Antonio Fire Department — using its mobile unit — have provided medical services to 725 migrants.

»The Travis Park Church has hosted about 3,100 migrants, housing between 120 and 150 people a night — up from about 50 per night when the church first opened its doors in late March.

» Three hundred thirty-nine city employees have volunteered at the resource center or the church shelter.

The center opened after immigration authorities began releasing thousands of migrants en masse at the border. Many then come to San Antonio as the first stop on their journey to reach family members throughout the United States while they await their court hearings.

The migrants are dropped off at the bus station, often with small children. They don't speak English, many don't have money for a bus fare or a change of clothes, and often don't know they are in San Antonio.

“They literally have no place to go or rest once they are transported to San Antonio and would be forced to sleep on downtown streets upon their arrival,” Walsh said in his memo. “In addition to the clear humanitarian need, this influx of people could also pose health and safety concerns for our downtown area.”

Wednesday was like any other day at the resource center. Dozens of migrants were crammed inside the 2,100-square-foot storefront, a former Quiznos. Many lingered on the sidewalk to get some fresh air.

Honduran migrant Santos Gabriel Carcamo, 58, sat on the curb with his 6-year-old daughter Kimberly.

He left the town of Yoro last February, two years after his wife died. At first he said she died from a heart attack, but later, tears in his eyes, said it was possible she was the victim of gang violence. He found her with blood coming out of her nose and ears.

After she died, he started getting threatening texts from gangs. On Feb. 18, 2018, three days before he left Honduras, he said he got a final text.

“It said it was going to kill me and my daughter,” he said.

They crossed the Rio Grande between Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass on Saturday. After arriving in San Antonio, he and his daughter spent the day Wednesday at the resource center. They were served a meat-and-potato stew and received donated clothes, toiletries, toys and more snacks for the road.

“We’re not from here, and we need them,” he said. “They’ve taken care of us.”

As he spoke, his daughter Kimberly played with some of the toys and pulled out items from the backpack a volunteer had given her.

“A cup, daddy!” she said, lifting a coffee mug.

“Yes, my love,” Carcamo replied.

“And these, too!” she giggled, pointing at a bag of Crayola crayons and then pulling them out one-by-one.

“Don’t do that, my love, not here on the street,” he cautioned, with a smile. He and Kimberly planned to leave for Miami, where he has family, later in the day.

“I want a better future for my daughter,” Carcamo said. “Because I know she’s growing up, and I’m slowing down.” [\*\*sfosterfrau@express-news.net\*\*](mailto:sfosterfrau@express-news.net)