

## Days Inn population decreasing gradually

### METHUEN

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METHUEN — With three months until the anticipated closure of the Days Inn shelter, the number of families still taking shelter in the city has dropped to 50.

Since Jan. 13, at least 21 families have left the shelter at the Days Inn hotel, according to a state report released last week.

In October 2022, the state began using the Days Inn as part of its Emergency Assistance shelter system which has been taxed in recent years including from immigration and the high cost of living.

The state's planned June 30 closure of the hotel is part of a shift away from using hotels in the system. Officials have said paying for rooms is both more expensive and often puts residents in worse conditions.

Earlier this week, Mayor D.J. Beaugard said he had not heard anything from the state that would suggest they were deviating from the time frame.

The state has also been tightening eligibility requirements.

In late February, more than 75% of families seeking shelter were long-time Massachusetts families, according to the office of Gov. Maura Healey.

Management of the shelter is overseen by Lowell based nonprofit Community Teamwork.

“In addition to the extensive case management we do with our families, one of the primary goals

of the work we do is to help rehouse families,” Communications Director Kathleen Plath said.

“We have helped to successfully rehouse many of the families in Methuen since the shelter has opened, and we continue to do so in light of the upcoming hotel shelter closings.”

Plath said this includes looking at the shelter residents' housing history with a focus on successful tenancies and potential housing provider references, identifying desired areas to relocate and completing the relevant housing applications.

It's unclear how many students from the shelter will continue to attend city schools after the closure. Even if students are no longer living in Methuen but remain homeless, they will have the right to stay with the school district.

So far the state has allocated more than \$2 million to Methuen to pay for the cost of educating children from

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shelters.

While health and safety at the Days Inn have been a problem in the past, recent health and crime reports indicate the area is far cleaner and safer than it has been.

State officials have also looked to shorten the stays of shelter seekers in the state's systems. Under a supplemental budget signed in February by Healey, stays are now limited to six months. The budget also included \$425 million to keep the shelter system funded through the end of the fiscal year.

As of the report 56 rooms at the hotel were being

used as shelter. According to city permits, Days Inn has a total of 118 rooms.

The Days Inn is not the only hotel in the area used by the state as part of its shelter system. In Andover, 15 families are staying in a hotel through the emergency shelter program and occupy 15 rooms.

The shelter system is predicted to cost the state roughly \$1 billion this fiscal year. The state plans to close all hotel shelters by the end of the year.

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