



THE SUN

Sunday, November 9, 2025 \$3.00 FACEBOOK.COM/LOWELLSUN X.COM/LOWELLSUN

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SHUTDOWN IMPACTS

CTI cuts staff in Head Start programs

Federal payments lapsed Oct. 31 due to ongoing government shutdown

By Melanie Gilbert
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LOWELL » Community Teamwork Inc. announced that it has been forced to furlough, reduce and eliminate staff positions due to the ongoing government shutdown and the resulting suspension of federal funding for the Head Start program.

The community action agency,

which provides support and services to 70 different communities in the commonwealth, furloughed approximately 50 Head Start staff members and reduced hours for an additional 22 employees, as well as eliminated several positions.

"Our dedicated Head Start staff are the heart of this program, and these furloughs represent the most difficult decisions we've

had to make," CEO Carl Howell said in a statement. "The federal shutdown has created an impossible situation — we are doing everything we can to support our staff, children, and families while advocating for an immediate resolution at the national level."

CTI emphasized that these measures are temporary, and operations should return to normal



The entrance to Community Teamwork's Houlares Center at 126 Phoenix Ave. in Lowell, which houses the Early Learning Head Start Program.

The program
MELANIE GILBERT
— LOWELL SUN

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MERRIMACK VALLEY FOOD BANK

'EVERYBODY COMES TOGETHER'



PETER CURRIER — LOWELL SUN

From left, Merrimack Valley Food Bank Development Director Kim Trainor, Executive Director Debbie Gallery, Program Director Roberta Emerson, Tewksbury Girl Scout Troop 70422 member Evelyn Kelley, her mother Erin Kelley, MVFB Finance Director Christina Spiciale, Communications and Public Relations Director Kelly Proulx and her son, Max Proulx. The Kelleys dropped off a donation from the Girl Scout troop collected during an emergency food drive set up after federal food benefits were cut off.

Emergency food drive sees significant support amid SNAP cutoff

By Peter Currier
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LOWELL » The rapidly approaching holiday season tends to be the busiest part of the year for agencies and nonprofits that deal with food assistance, but compounding factors like the ongoing government shutdown and the cutoff of food assis-

tance benefits has sparked an early scramble to gather donations this year.

Merrimack Valley Food Bank Program Director Roberta Emerson has lived her whole life in Greater Lowell. If there is one thing she can say about the people in the region, it is that "everybody comes together" in times of crisis.

"We have had food donations, the phone has been ringing off the hook. Everything is, 'What can I do? When can I come by? Where can I donate?'" said Emerson. "We live in such a great community that when the chips are down, everybody comes up

and rises above and does what they can to help everybody in need."

The mission of getting food to people in need is certainly not a new one for the MVFB, but with the country now in the longest government shutdown in its history, and benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cut off last week for millions of Americans, the demand for food assistance spiked significantly. This prompted the MVFB to partner with the city of Lowell, Merrimack Valley Central Labor Council, Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, Revolutionary Valley, Rockland Trust

and state Reps. Tara Hong, Rodney Elliott and Vanna Howard to organize an emergency food drive over the last week, culminating in a drop-off day Saturday at the MVFB warehouse.

The food bank typically does not distribute food directly to the people in need, but instead sends it to its more than 100 partner agencies in and around Greater Lowell to distribute directly.

The response to the emergency food drive has been significant, Emerson said, with people showing up constantly

LOWELL DISTRICT COURT

Judge sets bail for man accused of flinging colostomy bag at LGH staff, police

Antonio Santiago held on \$500 bail in assault case

By Aaron Curtis
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LOWELL » A man accused of hurling a colostomy bag filled with human waste at Lowell General Hospital staff and police officers after claiming he was denied proper medical care will remain behind bars — at least for now.

Antonio Santiago, 45, appeared in Lowell District Court in handcuffs on Friday, where Middlesex Assistant District Attorney Kate McCarthy successfully requested he be held on \$500 cash bail for eight counts of assault with a dangerous weapon stemming from the alleged colostomy bag incident at Saints Campus on Oct. 28.

Each count corresponds to one of the individuals present when Santiago allegedly threw the bag.

During Friday's hearing, McCarthy provided details of the bizarre incident to Judge William Travaun Bailey, stating that Santiago had been discharged from the hospital after receiving treatment and with supplies to change the

ASSAULT » PAGE 12



AARON CURTIS — LOWELL SUN

From right, Antonio Santiago appears in Lowell District Court with his attorney, Thomas Mixon, on Nov. 7, 2025. Santiago faces charges of assault with a dangerous weapon after allegedly throwing his colostomy bag at Lowell police officers and hospital staff at Lowell General Hospital's Saints Campus.

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CTI

FROM PAGE 1

as soon as funding is restored.

The agency is one of six Head Start programs in Massachusetts that did not receive its scheduled payments from the federal government after the annual funding cycle ended on Oct. 31.

The agency's Head Start program serves hundreds of low-income children and families across Greater Lowell and the Merrimack Valley, providing early education, nutrition and family support services that promote school readiness and long-term success.

In a statement, CTI said the shutdown's immediate impact on its early education programs will lead to larger class sizes, higher caseloads for remaining staff and a reduction in behavioral health supports available to children and families.

"These actions are being implemented reluctantly, with the goal of maintaining as many services as possible during the funding lapse," the statement said.

Established in 1965, CTI



MELANIE GILBERT — LOWELL SUN

Gov. Maura Healey and state Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler visit with children in Community Teamwork's Head Start program prior to announcing the continuation of funding for the Commonwealth Cares for Children stabilization grants on Sept. 5, 2024.

serves more than 60,000 individuals and families in the city of Lowell and the seven surrounding towns of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro and Westford.

Sixty years ago this past May, President Lyndon Johnson signed the law creating Head Start, a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that provides com-

prehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services.

In September 2024, Gov. Maura Healey visited CTI's Head Start program with Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler to announce the Commonwealth Cares for Children stabilization grants. The grants replaced federal pandemic monies with permanent state sub-

sidies to make high-quality child care more affordable and accessible to families.

CTI offers five center-based Head Start/Early Head Start Early Learning programs including Lowell's James Houliars Early Learning Center; the Children's Village at the Mill; Toddler Corner; the Lowell Collaborative Preschool Academy, in conjunction with Lowell Public Schools;



MELANIE GILBERT — LOWELL SUN

The entrance to Community Teamwork Inc., at 126 Phoenix Ave. in Lowell, which houses the Early Learning Head Start Program. The program accepts children ages 6 weeks to 5 years of age from low-income families.

and at Parker Avenue Elementary in Dracut.

The programs accept children 6 weeks to 5 years of age, until they are ready for kindergarten.

"These teachers and family advocates are more than educators — they're lifelines," CTI Vice President of Child and Family Services Shawna Doran said. "Many of our children rely on Head Start for not only learning, but nutrition, stability, and access to behavioral health sup-

ports. Every day this shutdown continues, those supports are at risk. ... We need the government to reopen. We need our Head Start programs funded. And we need the stability, security, and continuity that our children, families, and staff deserve."

On Monday, Nov. 10, the Massachusetts Head Start Association and CTI will hold a press conference calling for an end to the federal shutdown and a release of federal funding.

Assault

FROM PAGE 1

colostomy bag himself. He refused to leave, however, allegedly demanding staff change it for him.

When police were called and asked him to leave, Santiago allegedly removed the bag and threw it, nearly striking one officer in the head and just missing another, according to a Lowell Police incident report.

"Essentially, the defendant had a colostomy bag on, he then ripped that colostomy bag off and threw it at the nurses as well as the police officers," McCarthy told Bailey. "He threw it at this glass barrier, and that colostomy bag splattered across the hospital."

In requesting that Santiago be released on his own

recognition, his attorney, Thomas Mixon, told Bailey, "I've never seen a case like this in my life."

"The defendant goes to the hospital to get service. He tells me he had the colostomy bag on for five days. It was causing him sores, so he does the only thing he can do," Mixon said, noting that his client was simply seeking medical treatment.

After tossing the bag, Mixon pointed out that hospital staff ultimately provided Santiago with a new one, which is what he wanted all along.

Mixon noted during Friday's hearing that he had visited Santiago at the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction in Billerica, where he has been held since his arraignment hours after the incident on Oct. 28. Santiago is currently being housed in the medical unit, deal-

ing with another health issue, Mixon said. He assured Bailey that his client would not return to Saints Campus for treatment if he were released.

The assurance aligns with a Lowell Police report that states a doctor provided officers with a letter describing Santiago as a "violent patient" who had allegedly thrown human feces at staff on separate occasions "when he is angry and does not get what he demands." The letter also stated that Santiago is no longer welcome at the hospital due to his alleged behavior.

When asked about the case on Friday, Jeremy Lechan, a spokesperson for Lowell General Hospital, said in an email to The Sun that due to privacy laws, the hospital could not comment on any individual or their care.

In addition to successfully requesting \$500 bail, McCarthy also asked the court on Friday to revoke Santiago's personal recognition release in a separate larceny case from approximately month prior to the colostomy bag-flinging incident.

That case stems from an incident in which Santiago is accused of stealing an electric scooter from the Lowell High School property. According to a police report, Santiago was spotted with the scooter and engaged in a foot pursuit with officers before being taken into custody. He was allegedly found in possession of bolt cutters and a broken bike lock.

Police said at the time of the incident he had an active no-trespass order from the school due to previous incidents involving the theft of electric scooters and elec-

tric bikes.

McCarthy also told the court that Santiago has a 12-page Board of Probation record, which she described as containing a "slew of defaults" — meaning instances where he failed to appear in court as scheduled — for cases involving shoplifting, trespassing, larceny, and vandalism.

"The list goes on and on," McCarthy said.

She added that among the "dozens and dozens" of defaults, Santiago had failed to appear in an unarmed robbery case in Middlesex Superior Court in the early 2000s, as well as in a case involving assault and battery on an elderly or disabled person. He was also charged with escaping from a penal institution in 2003, she said, which he defaulted on as well.

Bailey ultimately rejected

McCarthy's request to revoke Santiago's personal recognition release in the earlier larceny case, ruling that Santiago would be held solely on the \$500 bail for the new assault charges.

After the hearing, Mixon said that Santiago — who is listed in court documents as homeless — would pursue assistance from the Massachusetts Bail Fund, a nonprofit that posts bail for low-income individuals who are unable to afford it.

Mixon added that he is pursuing a mental health evaluation for Santiago and working to get him the help he needs.

Santiago is scheduled to return to court for a pretrial hearing on Nov. 21.

Follow Aaron Curtis on X @aselahcurtis, or on Bluesky @aaroncurtis.bsky.social.

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