

# NYC college, American Musical and Dramatic Academy, gets millions to house migrants

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Colleges across the country are playing a key role in regions of the country disproportionately affected by an influx of asylum seekers.

For at least one of them, it's paying off handsomely.

A private college in New York City is being paid tens of millions of dollars by the city's public health care provider to use its dorms to house some of the thousands of people seeking asylum who have arrived in the city since last spring. Contracts obtained by USA TODAY and a report to New York City Health and Hospitals' board of directors show the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, an arts school in Manhattan, received millions of dollars earlier this summer to move students out of its dorms on the Upper West Side. The money was part of a multiyear contract with the institution valued at more than \$109 million.

Colleges in Illinois, Massachusetts and elsewhere in New York also have been tapped to deal with a surge in the need for housing for people crossing into the United States. In New York, the arrivals have overwhelmed the city's social safety net and pitted an increasingly exasperated mayor against national politicians he says aren't doing enough to help.

"This issue will destroy New York City," Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, said earlier this month in a rant that was widely panned by his progressive counterparts.

**Biden's visit, speech at UN** overshadowed by a crisis just across the street in NYC

A range of factors has driven the migration – including instability in Central and South America, political gamesmanship by Republican governors in border states and New York City’s legal mandate to provide shelter to anyone who needs it.

Per the latest count from city officials who testified in front of the New York City Council on Thursday, more than 116,000 migrants have sought refuge in the city since the spring of 2022.

“All we want is stability,” Cristina Garcia, an asylum seeker from Ecuador staying at the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan, told USA TODAY earlier this week.

The city has enlisted a wide array of outside contractors, including for-profit and nonprofit companies, to accommodate the migrants. Hundreds of contracts have been signed. Collectively, they’re worth billions. Though officials largely acknowledge the need to humanely accommodate the asylum seekers, the contracts have come under renewed scrutiny in recent weeks.

“These firms have quickly gotten huge payouts under looser emergency contract procedures to stand up an entire ecosystem of facilities and services,” said Gale Brewer, a city council member whose district includes Manhattan’s Upper West Side, at an oversight hearing on Thursday.

## **College received \$2.7 million to move students out**

In June, Adams announced that several of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy’s dorms would be converted to emergency shelters to help respond to the rush of asylum seekers. In a press release at the time, Ted Long, a senior vice president at New York City Health and Hospitals, the city-run not-for-profit that oversees the shelters, praised the decision.

“These two humanitarian centers for adult families and single women build upon the success of our existing relief centers, which connect guests to meals, medical care, mental health support, language access, technology, and reconnection services,” Long said. “I am proud to be a part of the Adams administration as we help to make a better life possible for those who turned to us for help.”

The contracts show Health and Hospitals paid the college \$2.7 million in non-refundable “transition fees” in June to move students out of the dorms on West 70th Street and West

85th Street. It paid about \$530,000 more in an upfront fee to use the 85th Street locations.

Exactly how much the college has charged Health and Hospitals so far is unclear. Health and Hospitals redacted the room rates from its contracts, which USA TODAY obtained through a public records request. However, a July 27 report to the organization's board of directors from Mitchell H. Katz, the president and CEO, discloses the contract may be terminated "for an amount not to exceed \$109,010,880."

Health and Hospitals has committed nearly \$2.2 billion in contract dollars so far related to the migrant crisis, according to a recent city council report. That commitment is larger than any city agency.

Katz's report to his board of directors says the organization has done the "necessary due diligence" in procuring its contracts.

Though it's unclear how many students were relocated from AMDA's dorms earlier this summer, Sam Goldsmith, Brewer's press secretary, said they were moved to other properties owned by the school. Health and Hospitals then transferred approximately 600 single adults into the dorms in June, Goldsmith said.

Starting the first week of September, they were moved to a different asylum-seeker shelter, the city's largest, on Randall's Island so that Health and Hospitals could move families into the single-room occupancy dorms. About 50 families have moved in this month, according to Goldsmith.

The facility is now full, Adam Shrier, a spokesperson for Health and Hospitals, said in an email to USA TODAY. Though AMDA's school year starts Oct. 23 according to the school's website, the dorms will remain occupied by the migrant families throughout the school year.

John Galgano, a spokesperson for AMDA, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Kayla Mamelak, a City Hall spokesperson, referred USA TODAY to Health and Hospitals for a response.

**Addressing a surge in immigration:** NY to spend \$25M in state funds to rent homes for thousands of asylum seekers

## **Colleges nationwide respond to the migrant crisis**

The arts school is far from the only college that has been recruited to respond to the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers in parts of the U.S.

After Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey declared a state of emergency over the migrant crisis in August, she asked her state's colleges to consider providing space for people.

Massachusetts, like New York City, has a right-to-shelter law. Officials at the University of Massachusetts said in August that one of the university's dorm and conference centers would be repurposed to potentially house migrants. Other schools around the state, including Eastern Nazarene College and Salem State University, have provided space for asylum seekers, too.

Over the summer, migrant families lived in gyms at two public colleges in Chicago. About 700 people were moved to Wilbur Wright College and Richard J. Daley College in May and June, according to Block Club Chicago. Despite some local opposition, Juan Salgado, chancellor of City Colleges of Chicago, said he felt it was important for the schools to step in and relieve the city's police stations, which he said were being overwhelmed by the number of migrants living there.

“We had a better solution,” he said in an interview earlier this summer. “We just raised our hand and said we think we can help here.”

Housing asylum seekers hasn't been without debate on some campuses. In May, Buffalo State University in upstate New York agreed to house several dozen migrants in its dorms. It abruptly evicted them in August, though, after some students expressed concerns about crime in local hotels where other migrants were staying, according to The Buffalo News.

## **Politicians weigh in on housing asylum seekers on campus**

The debate over using colleges to host asylum seekers stretched from campus to Congress this summer.

In a May letter, two New York Democrats – Reps. Jamaal Bowman and Dan Goldman – urged the president of New York University, along with the chancellors of the city and state's public university system, to step up their support.

“State governors such as Florida's Ron DeSantis and Texas' Greg Abbott would like us to turn against each other and embrace anti-immigrant sentiments,” they wrote. “We must show the

rest of the country that when all sectors of our society come together, we can live up to our highest values and ideals as we welcome new immigrants to our community.”

Many conservatives rejected that idea. Rep. Marcus Molinaro, a New York Republican, introduced a bill called the Schools Not Shelters Act that would deny federal funding to K-12 schools and colleges that house or otherwise provide support to migrants. It passed the Republican-majority U.S. House in July. Facing a Democratic president and majority in the Senate, though, it’s unlikely to go any further.

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