

District 51

Joseph C. Borelli

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NYC to spend millions on new round of pre-paid debit cards for migrants

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By The Center Square

New York City officials are dramatically expanding a controversial program that gives debit cards pre-loaded with cash to migrant families staying in taxpayer-funded hotels across the city.

The Adams administration says another round of debit cards is expected to be distributed to more than 7,300 migrants over the next six months, costing the city about \$2.6 million. The move represents a major expansion of a pilot program that began earlier this year that doled out cards to about 3,000 migrants.

New York City Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Anne Williams-Isom says the program allows newly arriving families the ability to “make choices for themselves and their children” by using debit cards.

“They can buy from local shops, support small businesses, and manage their own resources,” she said in a statement. “When we empower people, we help them achieve self-sufficiency and access the American Dream.”

Mayor Eric Adams has defended the program as a “cost savings measure” that “temporarily” replaces New York City’s existing system of providing non-perishable food boxes to migrant families staying in hotels and other city-funded shelters.

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The program is a partnership between the Adams administration and the company New York City Finance, which says the plan will help migrants with food, baby supplies and other necessities as they await authorization to work from the federal government.

Under the program, a four-person family with children under five can receive up to \$350 per week, or about \$18,200 a year, according to published news reports.

Critics, including New York Council member Joseph Borelli, have argued that the debit cards are “fundamentally unfair” to the city’s working poor, who don’t receive similar benefits from the city.

Borelli and other Republicans argue that the city’s right to shelter law, which requires it to provide housing, food and other necessities — coupled with the city’s ‘sanctuary’ policy cooperation with immigration crackdowns — are drawing a record number of migrants to the city.

New York City has seen more than 183,000 asylum seekers arrive over the past year amid a historic surge of immigration along the U.S.-Mexico border. Over the past year, the city has spent more than \$1 billion on tens of thousands of migrants under its care and expects to spend about \$10 billion on migrant costs in coming years.

City officials say the cards cost about half as much as delivering boxes of food to the families staying at hotels and other city shelters. The program has saved the city more than \$598,000, officials said, and is projected to save \$4 million on migrant costs by the end of this year.

Earlier this year, a group of Congressional Republicans, including Reps. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., Barry Moore, R., Ala., and Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., blasted the program and questioned whether federal funds are being used for the debit cards, how city officials are determining eligibility to receive the money, and whether they are tracking how and where it is being spent.

They pointed out that the \$350 made available to migrants each week as part of the debit card program exceeds the average \$291 per month given to low-income, elderly and disabled U.S. citizens through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps.

The GOP lawmakers also chided Adams over the city’s “sanctuary” status, as well as the city’s transportation and housing programs that they claimed are encouraging “illegal immigrants” to flood the city.

<https://nypost.com/2024/07/03/us-news/nyc-to-spend-millions-on-new-round-of-pre-paid-debit-cards-for-migrants>

00:00 Councilman Borelli speaks



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