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Biden's Border Fiasco Costing Local Taxpayers Billions

That's why big-city mayors are whining

By [Andrew R. Arthur](#) on May 4, 2023

In a recent [op-ed](#) in the New York Post, I explained why Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot's (D) [anger](#) toward Texas Governor Greg Abbott (R) over his renewed plans to bus migrants released by DHS at the Southwest border are misplaced. It's not Abbott's fault he's sending those migrants north; Biden's feckless "[catch and release](#)" policies at the Southwest border are to blame for those migrants' presence here to begin with. That said, I understand Lightfoot's frustration, given that those Biden policies are costing cities and towns across the country tens to hundreds of billions in taxpayer dollars.

NYC's Costs. Lightfoot was not alone in her grumblings, as New York City Mayor [Eric Adams](#) (D) was also busy firing his own [peppery rockets](#) (similarly misaimed) in Abbott's direction over the migrants headed Gotham's way.

Fortunately for analysis purposes, however, NYC does a better job than most cities and towns of quantifying the costs those migrants impose on its municipal coffers. Those costs were included in a [March](#) report from the city's comptroller, captioned "Accounting for Asylum Seekers, Overview of City Budgeting and Contracting to Provide Services for New Arrivals".

In that report, the comptroller explains that different migrant demographic groups impose differing [per diem](#) costs on the city's fisc: NYC's tab for single adults is \$184 per day, while families with children cost the city \$339 per day.

Southwest Border Releases Under Biden. Through the end of March, I can [confirm](#) that the Biden administration has released 1,765,732 migrants encountered by CBP at the Southwest border. I believe that the actual total is higher than two million, but for the purposes of this analysis I will go with the more modest figure I can confirm with certainty.

Note that this figure does not include [288,739](#) unaccompanied alien children (UACs) from "non-contiguous" countries (i.e., not Canada or Mexico), all of whom would have been transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services for placement with "sponsors" in the United States. Those are costs too diffuse for me to measure, but it's bound to be several hundred dollars per day each.

Demographics of Released Migrants. Since February 2021, CBP has encountered 2,372,461 aliens who it then processed under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) — not including UACs — as opposed to expelling them under [Title 42](#).

Of that total, 1,062,024 were adults travelling with children in “family units” (FMUs), and 1,308,826 single adults — 2,370,850 in total.

The Biden administration stopped detaining aliens in family units in [December 2021](#), but did not detain many of them before that or hold them for very long.

To be on the safe side, however, I assumed that 44.8 percent of the migrants the Biden administration has released were families, and 55.2 percent were adults, consistent with the rate at which those aliens were processed under the INA as opposed to expelled.

Using those assumptions, 790,961 migrants in FMUs have been released under Biden, as were 974,771 single adults.

NYC Math. It is unclear from the comptroller’s March report whether the per diem rate for family housing is per person or per family. Again, to be safe, I assumed that it was per family and that the average family consisted of three members.

Under NYC’s math, therefore, the total cost per day for care and housing of the families would be \$89,378,706, and the single adults’ tab would be \$179,357,864 per day — for a total daily cost of \$268,736,570 for both families and single adults, or a yearly total of \$98,088,848,050 for just the migrants encountered by CBP at the Southwest border and released (not just in New York, but total).

That’s not the end of it, however.

According to Fox News, there were 599,000 “got-aways” — aliens who entered illegally and evaded overwhelmed Border Patrol agents — in [FY 2022](#), and 389,155 in FY 2021, for 988,155 in total. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz told Congress on [March 16](#) that there had been “at least” 385,000 more got-aways in FY 2023, which brings the total to 1,373,155.

Got-aways traditionally have been almost all single adults, which would add \$252,660,520 to the daily total bill, or \$92,221,089,800 on an annual basis, for a daily total of municipal costs — including releases and got-aways — of \$521,397,090, or a yearly total of \$190,309,937,850.

Additional Assumptions. Of course, not all migrants move to NYC, and not all of them require municipal housing and care for a full year.

With respect to the time that those migrants will receive municipal housing and care, however, note that the comptroller explains:

When asylum-seekers arrive at a [Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Center, “HERRC”] or [Department of Homeless Services] intake, staff work to help them identify other options, including relocation to other cities or states (for which travel costs can often be covered) or living with family. Nonetheless, the majority of families and approximately half of single adults have settled into the HERRC or shelter system, where they join individuals and families in a system where the average length of stay had stretched to 500 days even before the current crisis.

The term “majority of families” is not otherwise defined or quantified in that report, so to be on the safe side I will assume that 30 percent of families don’t require care for a year, while 70 percent do. As for the adults, I will cut the comptroller’s figure in half and find that just a quarter of adult migrants will require long-term municipal care and housing,

If you assume that 30 percent of family migrants and 75 percent of the single adults don't require care and housing, that brings the daily cost for families down to \$89,378,706 (\$32,623,227,690 per annum) and the adult costs down to \$44,839,466 (\$16,366,405,090 per annum), for a total per annum cost of \$48,989,632,780. If they go to some place where the cost of living is 30 percent cheaper than New York, that cost drops to \$34,292,742,946.

These are all conservative estimates, however, and that tally does not include the UAC costs, or the costs of education and hospitalization for the families or the single adults. Though NYC does include the costs of "medical screenings" and "basic medical care and some mental health supports" in its figures, there is no discussion of emergent care.

The Federal Government's Paltry Contribution. In its [FY 2023](#) appropriations, Congress directed CBP to transfer \$800 million to the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([FEMA](#)), "to establish a new Shelter and Services Program to support CBP in effectively managing migrant processing and preventing the overcrowding of short-term CBP holding facilities".

Thereafter, in March, FEMA awarded \$350 million of that amount to the National Board at FEMA's Emergency Shelter and Food Program-Humanitarian (EFSP-H) program "to help local communities around the country better manage the costs of [alien] arrivals in their communities".

More grants from that \$800 million CBP transfer to FEMA are likely to be allocated soon, but even if the whole amount goes to cities and towns that must pay for the housing and care of Southwest border migrants released by Biden's DHS and got-aways, it will offset — again by my most conservative estimate—just 2.3 percent of their municipal costs.

My Third Go-Round. This is my third attempt to quantify the costs to cities and towns for caring for and housing migrants who were either released by the Biden administration or who took advantage of the chaos the president has created at the Southwest border to evade apprehension.

My first, in [February](#) before the NYC comptroller issued its report, put the total costs at \$202 billion, while my second in [April](#) considered just the costs to NYC, Chicago, and Denver without a final tally.

That April assessment relied on an [April 20](#) article from RealClearInvestigations, which determined that migrants are imposing a municipal cost on NYC of somewhere between \$143,000 to \$150,000 per person per annum, or \$393.70 per day. I trust their analysis (and math) more than my own, but again I meant this latest effort to be an extremely conservative estimate.

If you consider that last figure — \$393.70 per day — and multiply it by the 3,138,887 migrants released under Biden and got aways as of mid-March (in toto), the total costs are \$1,235,779,811.90 per day, or \$451,059,631,343.50 per annum.

Applying my 30 percent discount for migrants in lower-cost locales than NYC, that per annum figure drops to \$315,741,741,940.45.

Whether the total costs to cities and towns for caring for migrants is \$451 billion or my most conservative estimate of more than \$34 billion, it's a lot of money for municipalities that are already trying to figure out how to pay for ordinary, day-to-day services and infrastructure for the non-"newly arrived".

Towns and cities fund all that through a variety of schemes, including sales tax surcharges, income tax surcharges (where they exist and are allowed), and, largely, property taxes. As municipal costs rise to pay for newcomers who can't provide for themselves, those taxes rise proportionally.

All these tens of billions of dollars in municipal costs to house and care for newly arrived migrants are due to the president and his feckless border policies. Joe Biden could spare local taxpayers even more billions of dollars in additional expenditures tomorrow if he wanted to. He doesn't.

Topics: [Biden Border Crisis](#), [Costs of Immigration](#)