

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS GABRIELA COLETTA ZAPATA, RUTHZEE LOUIJEUNE, BRIAN WORRELL, BREADON, CULPEPPER, FITZGERALD, FLYNN, MEJIA, MURPHY, PEPÉN, SANTANA, AND WEBER



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING THE BOSTON EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

- WHEREAS,** Boston has experienced a variety of residential fire emergencies that have left residents displaced and in financially precarious situations; *and*
- WHEREAS,** On July 19th, 2022, a fire occurred at a triple-decker on Princeton Street in East Boston in the midst of some of the highest temperatures on record across the City of Boston. Boston firefighters fought the five-alarm fire that burned through all three stories of the building while battling heat exhaustion. The fire displaced twenty-eight people, including eight children – four who are under the age of two, many had no housing after losing all of their belongings, and almost none had renters or homeowners insurance; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Similarly, on April 2nd, 2024, a six-alarm fire ravaged a home on Meridian Street in East Boston, claiming the lives of a child as well as an adult resident, and displacing thirty people. Last year, East Boston again dealt with another fire on Prescott Street that displaced twenty-seven people. These devastating emergencies have occurred all over the city; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The City of Boston response from Neighborhood Services, Emergency Management and Medical, Housing Stability, and has been vital in assisting non-English speaking, undocumented, and low-income families on scene; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Local grassroots organizations often scramble to raise funding for housing and gather clothing donations for displaced residents. However, many still lack adequate housing and instability two months later due to the skyrocketing rate of rental units; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Historically, our communities have united to implement mutual aid funds benefiting these families in the absence of adequate city resources to help affected residents get back on their feet. However, it is the city’s responsibility to address gaps in fire emergency support and response; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Research shows that there are long-lasting adverse mental health effects from home displacement, and is exacerbated by financial stress. The rapid deployment of resources toward relocation for permanent housing can substantially reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress; *and*

WHEREAS, The City of Boston must have a standardized process when individuals are displaced after an emergency like a fire or building collapse. Additionally, the City should implement an emergency relief fund to cover initial housing costs and basic necessities like food and clothing; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

Be it ordained by the City Council of Boston as follows:

The City of Boston Municipal Code, Ordinances, Chapter VI Section 6-3.14 is hereby inserted by adding the following new sections and subsections:

SECTION 1. Establishment and Purpose of Funds

- a. The Collector-Treasurer shall establish the “Emergency Relief Fund”. Subject to approval by the Boston City Council and the Mayor, the Fund be and hereby is authorized to accept and expend any and all funds contributed to it consistent with the purposes of the Fund. The Collector-Treasurer shall administer distributions from the Emergency Relief Fund for the benefit of residents who are determined by the Fund Administrator, in consultation with the Emergency Assistance Council, to be experiencing displacement or necessitous circumstances as a result of a qualifying emergency. The Fund Administrator, with the approval of the Mayor, shall determine the amount of assistance to be provided to each eligible recipient. Payments shall be issued on a schedule established by the Collector-Treasurer and processed through the City Auditor in accordance with standard municipal financial procedures.
- b. The Boston Emergency Relief Fund (the "Fund") is established to provide critical financial assistance to residents experiencing extraordinary and unforeseen home displacement or damages that render the home uninhabitable due to an emergency. Qualifying emergencies include fires, building collapses, and other disasters, which can have a lasting impact on residents and pose significant financial hardships. The Fund shall expend any monies appropriated for these purposes as set forth in section 3.
- c. Landlords remain responsible for providing technical and financial assistance for the emergency support of tenants in accordance with M.G.L. Ch. 175 § 99.

SECTION 2. Use of Funds

Public funds allocated to or expended from the Emergency Relief Fund shall not be granted to, or used for the purpose of founding, maintaining, or aiding any private, charitable, or religious institution or undertaking. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the City from providing direct financial assistance to eligible residents, or from contracting with third-party service providers when necessary to administer or deliver emergency relief in

accordance with this ordinance.

The Collector-Treasurer, or any successor department designated by the Mayor, is authorized to accept grants and gifts of funds from the federal government, the Commonwealth, or any agency or political subdivision thereof, and from charitable foundations, private corporations, or individuals, for purposes consistent with this ordinance, subject to the approval of the Mayor and City Council as required by law.

Notwithstanding the provisions of M.G.L. c. 44, § 53, all funds so received shall be deposited with the City Treasurer and maintained in a separate account and may be expended by the receiving department for the purposes of such grant or gift without further appropriation. Where expressly permitted by the terms of the grant or gift, interest earned on such funds shall remain with and become part of the grant account and may be expended for authorized purposes without further appropriation. All funds accepted pursuant to this section shall be expended in accordance with the conditions of the grant or gift and applicable federal, state, and local laws.

SECTION 3. Governance of Fund

- a. The governance of the Fund is a function that is exclusive under the jurisdiction and control of the Mayor of Boston. In accordance with their authority, the Mayor hereby establishes the Fund Administrator shall be responsible for advising the Mayor in connection with matters related to the Emergency Fund which they are otherwise empowered to perform at their sole discretion. The Mayor may, with or without receipt of a recommendation from the Fund Administrator, authorize dispersal of funds beyond the recommendation of the Administrator, or in the absence of their consent.
- b. The Fund Administrator will be assigned from the Treasury Department, overseen by the Mayor's office. The Fund Administrator is authorized to utilize data from the Office of Neighborhood Services, Emergency Management Department, the Office of Housing Stability, and the Fire Department in duties related to the Fund.
 1. The Fund Administrator, along with the Mayor's office, is encouraged to perform consistent outreach and education to connect residents with all the possible emergency support options available, such as but not limited to grants, funds, and government assistance.
- c. The Mayor shall establish the Emergency Assistance Council. The Council is designated to assist and provide advice to the Fund Administrator and the Mayor regarding monies collected and allocated. The Council shall be formed of:
 1. Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services or their designee;
 2. Chief of Emergency Preparedness or their designee;
 3. Fire Commissioner or their designee; and
 4. Director of the Office of Housing Stability or their designee.

- d. The Emergency Assistance Council will convene with the fund administrator immediately following high displacement events due to emergencies such as a fire or a building collapse.

SECTION 4. Eligibility

- a. The Fund Administrator may make payments from the Fund to applicants who meet the eligibility requirements established in this section and have a household income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Boston-Cambridge-Quincy metropolitan area.
- b. Assistance from the Fund for any single incident shall not extend beyond 6 months from the date of the qualifying emergency. However, applicants with household income at or below 30% of Area Median Income may receive assistance for up to 12 months from the date of the incident if all of the following conditions are met: (1) the applicant has not returned to reside in the unit from which they were displaced, (2) the applicant has not secured permanent replacement housing, and (3) the building in which the incident occurred remains uninhabitable.
- c. The Fund Administrator may meet with applicants and applicants must be willing to attend any such meetings and cooperate with the Fund Administrator or their designee throughout the application process.
- d. Only residents of the City of Boston are eligible for assistance from the Emergency Relief Fund. Applicants must demonstrate that they were residents of the City of Boston at the time of the qualifying emergency through one or more of the following:
 - i. A copy of a bill issued by the City of Boston bearing the applicant's name and address, the name of their spouse, child, or parent;
 - ii. A copy of a lease agreement for a Boston address bearing the signature of the applicant, their spouse, child, or parent;
 - iii. A copy of a deed for Boston property bearing the name of the applicant or their spouse, child, or parent;
 - iv. Correspondence from the Boston Public School system addressed to the applicant, the applicant's child, spouse, parent, or guardian; or
 - v. Any other documentation deemed sufficient by the Fund Administrator to establish Boston residency at the time of the incident.
- e. Applicants will be eligible for a payment not exceeding the following amounts based on household size: \$7,000 for a one to two person household, \$8,500 for a three to four person household, \$10,500 for a five to six person household, and \$11,500 for a seven or more person household. Applicants must disclose on their application whether they have filed or are currently pursuing any legal claims against the City of Boston related to the emergency that forms the basis of their application. The payment amount for each applicant shall be determined by the Fund Administrator based on household size and

Area Median Income level, and the Fund Administrator may consider any such pending or filed legal claims against the City and any funds received from property owners, landlords, or other entities when determining the appropriate payment amount.

- f. The Fund Administrator has the authority to provide funds based on the household size amounts, regardless of the applicant's ability to demonstrate need.

SECTION 5. Reporting

- a. The Fund Administrator shall provide a biannual report to review and make recommendations regarding the allocation of funds, ascertain needs and trends within the community, recommend improvements in community outreach and education, and identify partners for provisional assistance. The report shall include expenditures, the current balance of the Fund, and characteristics and trends of individuals seeking assistance and donors. The report shall be filed with the City Clerk and submitted to the Mayor's Office and the City Council by March 15 and December 1. The report shall be made publicly available.
- b. The Emergency Assistance Council shall review and discuss the biannual report released by the Fund Administrator in consultation with the Mayor's office.
- c. The Fund Administrator, in consultation with the Mayor's office, is responsible for regularly communicating the status of the Fund and its activities. The Fund Administrator shall process and acknowledge all donations, and the Mayor's office shall regularly provide donors with the opportunity to donate to the fund and shall be given the option to provide donations anonymously.
- d. The Fund Administrator, in consultation with the Mayor's office, may request an optional anonymous survey to fund recipients about how the funding was utilized.
- e. The reporting requirements established in this section shall be implemented one year from the effective date of this ordinance.

SECTION 6. Severability

The provisions of this Section are severable, and if any provision, or portion thereof, should be held to be unconstitutional or otherwise invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, such unconstitutionality or invalidity will not affect the remaining provisions, which will remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 7. Effective Date

The provisions of this ordinance shall be effective immediately upon passage.

Filed on: February 25, 2026