

The Accumulated Costs of Denver Migrants

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Denver Mayor Mike Johnston is petitioning the U.S. federal government for financial reinforcements to help with the ongoing struggle to support migrants from the southern border. To date, 38,700 of these migrants have arrived in Denver, 2,400 of whom are currently being served in city shelters. The city has begun cutting services, most recently cutting worker hours at parks and recreation facilities, among other items.

City expenses alone do not accurately reflect the amount of community expenditures on the issue. Costs for shelters, food, and transportation are incurred by the city directly, but healthcare, education, and charitable organizations incur their own costs. City, healthcare, and education spending has already reached between \$78 million and \$100 million for the period between December 2022 and the present. This conservative estimate includes only what has been publicly reported during that period.

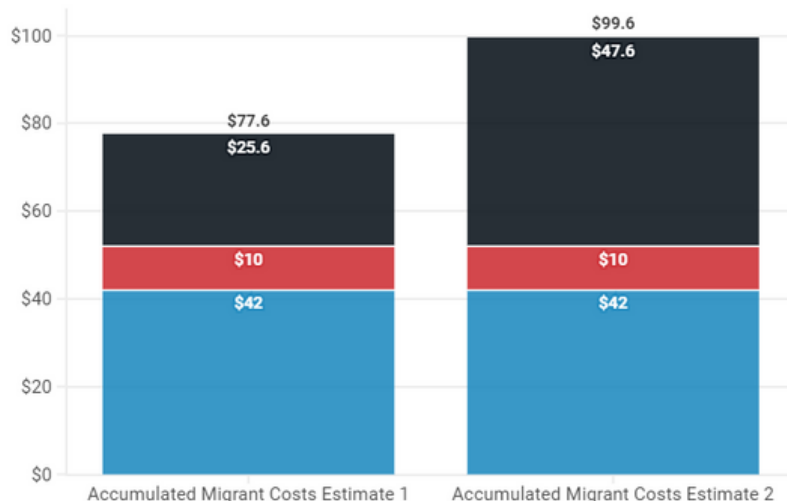
City of Denver

From the onset of the migrant arrival crisis in December 2022 through the present, Denver has spent an estimated \$42 million caring for migrants. Mayor Johnston projected the city would spend up to \$180 million – one-tenth of the city’s budget – by the end of 2024. He has asked the Denver City Council to make budget cuts to this end, including to the parks and Department of Motor Vehicles budgets. If the Denver mayor’s cost projections played out in real time, the city’s spending on migrants would equal the combined budgets of the Department of Parks and Recreation and Cultural Facilities and the Office of Human Services.

Migrant Costs in Denver

In Millions

City of Denver Denver-area hospitals Denver Public Schools



Healthcare

Migrant arrivals are stressing the uncompensated care output of the region’s hospitals. Denver Health, which is the city’s designated charitable care provider, has been experiencing an uptick in uncompensated care in the last several years, growing from \$60 million in 2020 to \$135 million in 2023. In 2023, [CEO Donna Lynne](#) said migrants contributed about \$10 million to that total.

Denver Public Schools

The money spent on public schools can be tallied by either obligated funding for children who are definitely enrolled or the money actually spent as of February 2024.

Districts are bearing their own costs as migrant children attend schools. Denver Public Schools has reported over 3,400 migrant children enrolling since last summer, around 2,000 of whom entered after the October date which determines state funding shares.

[Previous CSI research](#) has estimated Denver metro area districts spend \$14,100 per student on instruction and support. This translates to \$48 million in obligated spending to date.

Technically, however, not all that money has been spent. Roughly 2,000 of the migrant students absorbed into DPS did so after the October deadline for receiving the \$11,000 state contribution, leaving DPS with a \$22 million gap in its per student budget. If this money were not included, the total would be closer to \$26 million in actual spending to date.

Conclusion

Denver’s city-level spending, if it meets the mayor’s projections, will eclipse the annual budget for several city department and division budgets. CSI will continue to monitor spending as the southern border situation unfolds.

