



# ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE LEGALLY IN THE US NOTWITHSTANDING THE POLITICAL STUNTS OF GOVERNORS ABBOTT AND DESANTIS

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**By Cyrus D. Mehta and Kaitlyn Box\***

In a reprehensible political stunt, Governor Greg Abbott of Texas and Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida sent around [150 immigrants](#) to liberal states by bus and plane last week. Some of these individuals were abruptly dropped out outside Vice President Harris' residence in Washington, D.C., while others were transported to Martha's Vineyard. These immigrants, many of whom had come from Central American countries, had recently presented themselves at the southern border to request asylum. Reports have emerged that some of the asylum seekers were promised that they would receive work authorization more easily if they agreed to be sent to one of these locations. Some individuals believed they were going to Boston, only to be transported to Martha's Vineyard instead.

Abbott and DeSantis' action caused untold harm, placing individuals who were already vulnerable in a situation that was undoubtedly terrifying. Many of the asylum seekers were dropped off on the side of the road with nowhere to stay and few possessions. Some individuals had not been given food for hours. Because some of the asylum seekers had been issued Notices to Appear for immigration proceedings in Texas, Abbott and DeSantis effectively ensured that these individuals would have more difficulty attending their court dates by transporting them to a different part of the country. They also risk missing their court dates and be subjected to in absentia removal orders.

The governors' cruelty stands in sharp contrast to the [warm welcome](#) the asylum seekers were given by the communities in Martha's Vineyard and other

locations. Individuals and community organizations rallied to provide the immigrants with food, clothing, and shelter. Immigration attorneys have also sprung into action to provide legal services. This heartwarming response illustrates that most Americans, unlike Abbott and DeSantis, want to welcome and support immigrants.

Though the asylum seekers who unwittingly become pawns in Abbott and DeSantis' stunt happily found safety and compassion in the communities they were dropped into, this ploy was, at the very least, inhumane and could carry legal consequences for the two governors. California Governor [Gavin Newsom](#) has asked the Justice Department to investigate whether fraudulently inducing the asylum seekers to be transported across state lines could support charges of kidnapping under state law. Deliberately lying to and misleading vulnerable people could also render Abbott and DeSantis liable for fraud or severe emotional distress under the relevant state laws. It has even been suggested that luring the asylum seekers onto planes and buses with the false promise of work could constitute labor trafficking. Recently obtained documentary evidence confirms that idea that the asylum seekers were lured to Martha's Vineyard and other locations with false promises. Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR), a Boston-based legal organization that represents some of the asylum seekers, [provided a brochure](#) that was given to some migrants. The brochure erroneously states that the asylum seekers who were sent to Massachusetts would be eligible for numerous benefits, including "8 months cash assistance," "assistance with housing," "food," "clothing," "transportation to job interviews," "job training," "job placement," "registering children for school," and "assistance applying for Social Security cards".

At first blush, one may also wonder whether the governors have violated INA § 274(a)(1)(A)(ii), which imposes severe criminal penalties on persons for knowingly or in reckless disregard transporting a noncitizen who has come to, entered, or remains in the US in violation of law. However, invoking this provision may be less than helpful, as it pertains only to individuals who have come to, entered, or remained in the U.S. in violation of law, and thus feeds into the narrative that asylum seekers like the ones transported by Abbott and DeSantis are in the United States "illegally". It is important to recognize that it is not illegal for individuals to enter the United States to seek asylum. These individuals were lawfully released into the United States to pursue their asylum claims after an initial interview and processing by the Department of Homeland

Security at the border. The asylum seekers involved in this situation did nothing wrong by seeking protection under U.S. asylum laws. Rather, it is Abbott and DeSantis who engaged in a despicable, and possibly illegal, act.

It is clear that the poisonous attitudes of Trump, who catapulted himself to the presidency while calling migrants “criminals” and “rapists”, are now being borrowed by his apprentices like DeSantis and Abbott as a ploy to whip up anger against Democrats prior to the midterm elections. This strategy is unlikely to succeed as the American tradition of welcoming immigrants remains robust, as demonstrated by the Martha’s Vineyard community. While the pathway for people seeking asylum should remain, our immigration laws need to be radically overhauled to provide more pathways for people to come to the U.S. legally to work and to unite with family members. Asylum should not be the only option for those seeking to come to the U.S. If asylum is the sole option, the system will get overburdened as it has already and will also encourage spurious claims, which in turn undermine genuine claims of persecution. Both Democrats and Republicans need to work together in order to forge new pathways for immigration.

*(This blog is for informational purposes and should not be viewed as a substitute for legal advice).*

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