‘Our sector does not function without immigrants’: Employers grapple with loss of Haitian TPS holders

Business leaders warn of ‘lasting economic damage’ to Massachusetts as workers’ legal protections expire

By Katie Johnston Globe Staff, Updated July 28, 2026, 12:01 a.m.

A woman held a sign during a rally at City Hall Plaza last week in support of Haitians with Temporary Protected Status. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

In the wake of nearly 45,000 Haitians in Massachusetts losing their Temporary Protected Status Monday, many of whom fill crucial jobs in the economy, local business leaders warned their

removal could have “lasting economic damage” on the state.

In already short-staffed sectors that provide care for older and disabled residents, overtime and temporary workers costs stand to rise significantly, employers said. Job vacancies will increase. And patients who have taken comfort from the same people assisting them year after year will face disruptions in their care.

More than a third of home health and personal care aides in the state are foreign-born, including many Haitian TPS holders.

“Our sector does not function without immigrants,” said Bill Yelenak, president of the Providers’ Council, which represents 200 human-service agencies in Massachusetts. “These are folks, they passed background checks, they showed up for overnight shifts … and nothing about their work or effort changed, just their paperwork.”

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement is planning to ramp up efforts to detain and deport the 350,000 Haitian migrants nationwide losing TPS, according to multiple news outlets — including those who have been here legally for close to two decades.

Local employers said they are aware that their Haitian workers are in a dangerous position, facing arrest if they stay in the US and violence and political turmoil if they return to Haiti. Many Haitians in the US have no family or other ties in their home country, and nowhere to go.

In all, more than 10,000 Haitians in the Massachusetts workforce will be forced out of the country, many of whom fill crucial jobs in long-term care, hospitality, construction, and transportation. The state has the second-highest rate of international migration into the country, helping offset its low birth rate. Massachusetts needs at least 60,000 net new immigrants a year by 2030 to maintain its working-age population, according to a report by MassINC Policy Center and Boston Indicators. But the rate of new immigrants coming to the state has dropped sharply during Trump’s second term, the report found, and by the end of this year, Massachusetts could be at risk of “economic contraction.”

A Department of Homeland Security statement did not address reports of a crackdown on Haitian migrants, namely in Springfield, Ohio, where President Trump had falsely accused Haitian migrants of eating pets during his presidential campaign. In response to questions about targeting

Haitians, the administration noted law enforcement activities were being conducted every day to keep Americans safe.

“For too long, TPS has been allowed to function as a de facto amnesty program despite Congress never intending it to be permanent,” a spokesperson said in a statement Monday. “What we would say now is it’s closing time which means you don’t have to go home, but you can’t stay here.”

The administration knows Haiti isn’t safe to return to. The State Department advises Americans not to visit the country, which has the highest-level travel warning due to “crime, kidnapping, terrorism, unrest, and limited health care” and has been in a state of emergency since early 2024.

Under TPS, foreign nationals seeking refuge from environmental disasters, armed conflict, and other crises can legally live and work in the US. Hundreds of thousands of Haitians have flocked here since a massive earthquake in 2010, in addition to gang violence and the assassination of its leader.

Their TPS protection has been extended several times. But the Trump administration sought to end it, and last month the Supreme Court gave the administration the go-ahead to revoke TPS without judicial review.

Clamping down on TPS is part of getting immigration under control after President Biden’s term, said Thomas Hodgson, who ran an ICE detention facility when he was sheriff of Bristol County.

“If we need more people to come here because we have more job opportunities … then change the law,” said Hodgson, a Republican, who cited the need for immigration reform. “We have to control our growth. It’s not fair to communities to overwhelm our health system, to overwhelm our social services systems.”

Governor Maura Healey on Monday urged Congress to extend protections for Haiti and warned in a statement that allowing them to expire would have “significant consequences for families, employers, and essential services across Massachusetts.”

“Haitian TPS holders are essential contributors to our state’s workforce, filling roles that are vital to our economic stability and growth,” she said. “The sudden loss of their legal status and work authorization would be devastating for our state.”

Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell, who also called on Congress to preserve TPS protections, said in a statement Monday: “The termination of Haitian TPS is a cruel decision that ignores the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis in Haiti and threatens to tear families apart.”

The loss of migrant workers is exacerbating a “deep and persistent human services workforce crisis” in Massachusetts, according to an April report by the Providers’ Council and UMass Donahue Institute that found one in six direct-care jobs already vacant.

“There’s not a line out the door for these positions,” Yelenak said.

Three organizations alone have already lost more than 200 staffers among them because of immigration policy changes, he said; more than two-thirds of human services agencies surveyed reported their staff had experienced heightened stress, fear, and anxiety due to new federal immigration policies.

Hebrew SeniorLife, which provides long-term care, rehabilitation, and residential services for 4,500 seniors a day in Greater Boston, planned to terminate 36 Haitian TPS holders on Monday. Those workers have been eligible to apply for up to $1,000 each from an employee assistance fund — recently added to by senior leadership, residents, and patients — and are also receiving bonuses as part of their final payment.

Hebrew SeniorLife has been preparing for this moment for months, said CEO Adam Scott, and has managed to hire enough workers to fill 75 percent of the positions the Haitian workers are leaving behind. Last fall, the provider opened a training institute for certified nursing assistants and will have trained 110 students by the end of the first year of operations.

But bringing on new employees doesn’t make up for what’s being lost, Scott said.

“While we have a number of strategies to backfill these positions, loyalty is hard to replace,” he said. “These are productive members of society contributing to the economy who won’t be able to be employed as of 11:59 tonight.”

Temporary staffing agencies can help fill the void, but these short-term workers don’t have the longstanding relationships that can make the difference “between a good day and a crisis,” Yelenak said.

Temp workers can also cost twice as much as regular employees — increasing labor costs from roughly $20 an hour to $40 — and providers that operate under state contracts can't simply raise prices to make up the difference.

Revamping the budget to accommodate for these higher labor costs will lead to "difficult decisions," like holding off on needed technology or transportation investments, said Christopher White, president of Marshfield developmental disabilities provider Road to Responsibility.

White reluctantly let go of 17 workers on Friday — part of 119 immigrant workers lost due to Trump's policy changes — many who had been employees for more than a decade

"A few are trying to head to Canada," he said. "No one wants to go back to Haiti."

This story was produced by the Globe's Money, Power, Inequality team, which covers the racial wealth gap in Greater Boston. You can sign up for the newsletter here.

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