



Children play at Hempstead Lake State Park on a mild day Sunday. JEFF BACHNER

Storm to impact Tues. commute

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A winter storm is expected to bring slushy and wet conditions to Long Island, starting Monday night and into Tuesday, the National Weather Service said.

Long Islanders commuting the day after the Super Bowl will be met with a partly sunny Monday and temperatures in the upper 40s. Forecasters said the dry conditions are expected to last through midnight, before rain and wind gusts start to hit Long Island.

"Primarily after midnight, it'll be chilly rain with temperatures in the 30s and then we start to mix with, and change to snow Tuesday, and end with snow Tuesday afternoon," said Jim Connolly, a meteorologist with the weather service.

Long Islanders should prepare for slushy and wet road conditions Tuesday with wind chill values making it feel around 20 degrees throughout Tuesday afternoon. Forecasters said winds

could gust as high as 40 mph. "We've been seeing another winter with very few winter storms, so anytime we get a small storm, Long Islanders should be prepared for challenging travel conditions," said meteorologist Rich Von Ohlen.

The area could see about 1 inch or 2 of snow through Tuesday night, the weather service said.

Von Ohlen noted that Long Island is subject to some moderate coastal flooding, including the South Shore, which has been hit hard in recent months with rainstorms.

Northeastern New Jersey to the lower Hudson Valley and parts of southern Connecticut could see snow of up to 5 to 9 inches, as the National Weather Service has issued a winter storm watch.

Tuesday's conditions make way for a colder rest of the week, with temperatures dipping to the low to mid-30s.

Wednesday and Thursday will be sunny with temperatures in the 30s, but a chance of rain and snow showers is forecast for Thursday night. After a dry Friday, snow could return on Saturday, according to the weather service.

MIGRANT INFLUX IS

Growing need amid rising prices strains groups

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY BART JONES

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Food pantries and nonprofit legal and social service agencies are being strained by a record influx of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border illegally and in some cases making their way to Long Island, officials said.

Long Island Cares, the largest nonprofit food assistance group on Long Island, says demand jumped by one-third in 2023. Last month, Pronto, a major nonprofit serving the Brentwood area, hit a number it had never reached since its founding in 1969: 469 new families given assistance.

It is the newly arrived immigrants — mainly from Latin American countries including Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and Haiti — who account for most of the uptick in those seeking help, officials said.

"It's a very heavy burden to keep up with the rate of new immigrants coming in and providing the services that they need," said Vivian Hart, president and CEO of Pronto, which offers food, clothing, immunizations, health insurance and other assistance. "It's emotional to have to leave them without an answer."

The strain is being felt across Long Island, with some groups asking Pronto for help because they don't have enough resources of their own to meet the demand, she said. Agencies' budgets are being stretched to the limit, forcing them to find more funding.

Officials said the root of the problem is a broken immigration system that in 2023 saw 2.5 million immigrants entering the U.S. illegally.

Demand up as prices rise

Immigrants without documentation are generally not eligible for many governmental public benefit programs, so it is

falling to nonprofits, churches and other private groups to deal with the fallout.

"It is a miracle that we are able to complete each month with these increases in families" looking for help, Hart said. "We are going to be in a pickle if we don't get some relief."

"It's loaves and fishes," she said of the agency's ability to feed the hungry knocking on its doors, comparing it to "divine intervention" that may not last.

Some of the migrants are arriving on Long Island with little more than the clothes on their backs — and warm weather clothes at that, officials said.

Katy Lalaleo, 25, said she showed up at St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church in Westbury with no money, food or winter clothing after a harrowing journey from Ecuador with her two young daughters and her husband.

The parish's outreach office helped them with food and other basics so they could survive their first weeks here, she said.

"It was a great help," she said in Spanish. "When you first arrive, you have nothing."

The demand on food pantries is also being fueled by sharply rising food prices, meaning not only immigrant families are asking for help, officials said.

With food prices up 17% over the last two years, "that's not sustainable for families on fixed incomes," said Paul Pachter, president and CEO of Long Island Cares.

His group served 42,000 more people in 2023 than it did in 2022, and had to buy 650,000 pounds more food compared with the previous year. That cost an extra \$830,000, which LI Cares raised mainly through

We see that this is almost unsustainable for us."

— Vivian Hart, president and CEO of the nonprofit Pronto, which serves the Brentwood area

WHAT TO KNOW

- **Nonprofit agencies are being pushed to their limits** to service the growing number of immigrants without documentation on Long Island.
- **Food pantries and legal services agencies are seeing spikes in demand** in recent years, forcing them to seek out new income sources.
- **Rising food prices have compounded the problem**, fueling the demand from immigrant and nonimmigrant families, advocates say.

donations, fundraisers and grants, Pachter said.

"We are seeing it, and it is really challenging us," he said.

The group's biggest satellite pantry, in Freeport, has seen demand double since 2019, from 800 families in December that year to 1,500 families in December 2023. The number of meals served jumped from 23,000 to 55,000.

"It's so hard to keep up with it," said Reyna Felix, who helps direct the pantry.

Law clinics turn some away

Nonprofit agencies that are trying to help migrants obtain legal status say they also are having a hard time keeping up.

The Long Island Immigration Clinic, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, said its waiting list for help with asylum applications had jumped from about 10 a year ago to 25 now.

The group does not have enough volunteers to handle the demand, so it sometimes tells migrants to seek help elsewhere to make sure they don't miss the one-year deadline for applying for asylum after their arrival in the U.S.

"It's terrible. It makes you feel awful," said Sister Eileen McCann, a retired lawyer who heads the clinic. "Who wants to turn people away when you know they don't have many other alternatives? It's heart-breaking."

Migrants who seek asylum may be eligible to apply for a work permit about five months later while their case winds its

PUSHING LI NONPROFITS TO BRINK



Joshua Cordero, an employee at Pronto food pantry in Brentwood, collects items to be distributed to people in need last week.

way through the labyrinthine immigration system. The Biden administration also has granted temporary legal status to some Venezuelan migrants — the largest group coming into the United States — so they can be eligible for work permits.

Overall, though, governments on Long Island can do little to help immigrants without legal status, since under state and federal law they are generally not eligible for many social programs, officials said.

They can receive emergency medical care, and certain groups, such as children and pregnant women, are eligible for some federal and state health care programs. They also can receive emergency housing when a “Code Blue” — temperatures 32 degrees or lower — is declared, said Frances Pierre, commissioner of Suffolk’s Department of Social Services.

So far this winter, Suffolk has provided emergency housing to 11 undocumented immigrants during Code Blue,

Pierre said. Nassau County did not provide its corresponding number.

The burden on government has been far worse in New York City, where an unusual “right to shelter” decree requires it to provide housing to anyone who is homeless, including newly arrived migrants. The city has processed 175,000 migrants since April 2022, and expects to spend \$10.6 billion on housing and food for them through June 2025.

The exact number of immigrants without documentation who have arrived on Long Island is unknown, but they are part of a national “surge” during the past year and a half. One recent study by the Center for Migration Studies of New York put the total number on Long Island at nearly 112,000 in 2022, a 20% increase from the previous year, but that doesn’t include groups such as those who have filed for asylum.

McCann said many of those arriving defy the stereotype of poorly educated farmworkers,



Lisa Baker, a volunteer at Genesis Church's Grace Care food pantry in Medford, distributes items to people in need last week.

but instead are well-educated professionals in their countries: dentists, physical therapists and business owners.

“The rhetoric that you hear is so untrue,” McCann said. “Many of these people are professional people in their countries of origin and have been

subjected to terrible, terrible violence.”

Some pantries pop up

In Medford at the nondenominational Genesis Church, 650 people drive through 15 tents offering different types of food every Wednesday during a two-

hour pantry operation, said Ken Carmel, who directs the project. Sometimes the line of waiting cars is 100 deep.

Demand has remained steady, he said, but in the last year, at least three other food pantries have popped up in the same area, underscoring the growing need, he said.

His pantry has up to 15 intakes of new families a week, 80% of them Spanish-speakers, though he does not know how many are newly arrived or here illegally.

“There’s no shortage of people operating food pantries in this current environment,” he said.

Help for the migrants is emerging even in areas not known for large immigrant populations.

The Caroline Episcopal Church in Setauket opened a food pantry a year ago. It’s grown from serving a dozen families to 33 now, and expanded from being open one hour a week to two. Some of the growth is from migrants who work on local farms, said the Rev. Nickolas Griffith, rector of the church.

The effort has helped bring the community at large together because many groups from outside the church are pitching in, he said.

“We’re all being called to share in what we have in different ways,” Griffith said. “It’s really become a bonding experience bringing the community together to effect positive change.”

Agencies such as Pronto say that to sustain their work, they rely partly on the goodwill of private donors, but that can’t go on forever as demand soars.

“We see that this is almost unsustainable for us,” Hart said.

A big part of the problem is the immigration system itself, which results in large numbers of immigrants without documentation, officials said. If the system were to allow more legal immigration, more immigrants could be eligible for work permits and become more self-sufficient, Hart said.

For now, some of what her group does is “almost like a Band-Aid fix,” she said. “We are doing our best to meet the needs, but we are stretched to the limit.”

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