We, the undersigned, practitioners and researchers in the fields of housing and land rights and human settlements, gathered this weekend at MIT for a Global Conference on Strategies Against Evictions and Displacement, are deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis caused by the October 8 shutdown of Long Island shelters and programs in Boston Harbor serving 700 of the Boston area’s most vulnerable people. The lack of notice, the failure to provide adequate alternative shelter, the abrupt termination of services for people in recovery, the ongoing separation of displaceses from their possessions, and continual affronts to human dignity and safety constitute gross violations of globally recognized human rights, including the rights to adequate housing, health, personal security, and freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

We call on leaders in Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to declare an immediate State of Emergency to prioritize resources to resolve this crisis. We urge an immediate, transparent and inclusive dialogue with those displaced to engage them in decisions that affect their lives and to develop solutions. We urge local authorities to commit resources for permanent and transitional housing that meet global standards of decent, safe and healthy housing appropriate to the needs of affected vulnerable populations.

While plans for additional recovery and shelter beds on the Boston mainland are welcome and should continue, the area’s evident need for even more than were temporarily lost at Long Island suggests that urgent steps should be taken to re-open Long Island facilities now, at least those serving residential recovery programs, utilizing water ferries, boat ambulances, field clinics or temporary bridges, as is done worldwide in offshore islands. The United States has the resources to solve the problem of emergency island access, as it has done in countless humanitarian and military missions since World War II.

Immediate steps should be taken to help former Long Island residents recover their possessions, identity papers, clothing and medications, as well as agency and medical records, which reportedly few displacees have been able to retrieve six weeks after Long Island’s evacuation.

The undersigned stand ready to assist government leaders and civil society to ensure their efforts meet global human rights and humanitarian standards to resolve this crisis for the short and long term.

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Larry Vale  MIT*/Director, Resilient Cities Housing Initiative
Mel King  “Love is the Question and the Answer”
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