

[MORNING NEWS](#)
[PLAY LIVE](#) [Radio](#)
[PLAYLIST](#)



[DONATE](#)

NATIONAL

1,500 Miles From The Southern Border, Immigration Fight Disrupts Michigan Town

September 14, 2021 · 5:03 AM ET

Heard on Morning Edition

By Brett Dahlberg



3-Minute Listen

[PLAYLIST](#) [Download](#)
[Transcript](#)

The town has become an unlikely test case for President Biden's immigration policy. Alma's city commission will vote on whether to approve a shelter for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

Sponsor Message



NOEL KING, HOST:

A small city in Michigan is posing a test for the Biden administration's immigration policy. Alma is 1,500 miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border. Officials there are going to vote on whether to permit a shelter in the city for kids who cross the border without their families. Here's Brett Dahlberg with member station WCMU.

BRETT DAHLBERG, BYLINE: Normally, children fleeing violence and human trafficking in Central America would be housed in a shelter near the southern border while the federal government works with nonprofit groups to place them with a family member in this country. But those facilities are reaching capacity as the number of kids crossing the border by themselves increases. In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott has revoked the licenses of several shelters in that state. So the federal government has to look ever further from the southern border for places that can shelter refugee kids. In some places, it goes smoothly. Elizabeth Carey runs Starr Commonwealth, a group that welcomed about 200 migrant children to a shelter in Albion, Mich., about 100 miles west of Detroit.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

ELIZABETH CAREY: Actually, we have been just overwhelmed with joy about the outpouring of support we've received since this announcement.

DAHLBERG: Other shelters in Montana, Pennsylvania and North Dakota have taken in children. But approval is far from certain in Alma, where Yvette Franco-Clark is organizing opposition. She worries that immigration will funnel crime to the city of 9,000. It's a city where 98% of the population was born in the U.S. In addition, she doesn't trust the motives of Bethany Christian Services, which would run the shelter here.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

YVETTE FRANCO-CLARK: They're abusing Christianity to make a buck - plain and simple. And the people out there are saying, oh, we need to help them do that. We need to help them do this humanitarian work because you're not a Christian if you don't want to help these kids.

DAHLBERG: The U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement says it runs rigorous checks on everyone who crosses the border seeking asylum. And Bethany says as a charitable organization, it will not profit from a shelter in Alma. But those statements aren't easing the opposition's concerns. And that leaves the city's faith leaders struggling to figure out how to address the issue with their deeply divided congregations.

KATRINA PEKICH-BUNDY: I have not directly talked about it.

DAHLBERG: Katrina Pekich-Bundy is the pastor at Alma's First Presbyterian Church.

PEKICH-BUNDY: I have brought up how Jesus welcomed those who most of society turned away.

DAHLBERG: Pekich-Bundy says to her, there's a clear direction for the church - welcoming young refugees. But she's not sure if Alma is ready for it.

PEKICH-BUNDY: Having seen some of the yelling and the anger and the hate, it makes me question if this would be welcoming for somebody who's a person of color.

DAHLBERG: Muzaffar Chishti is a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute. He says the surge of young migrants crossing the southern border is forcing the federal government to look for shelters in places it normally wouldn't, where opposition to the refugees can be strong.

MUZAFFAR CHISHTI: It does become much more potent in places which don't have a lot of history of immigration. Numbers do matter.

DAHLBERG: Chishti says a proposal to house 40 migrant children in New York or Miami or Los Angeles might not raise concerns in the same way it does in a town like Alma.

CHISHTI: This is a very thick soup of anxiety that we are dealing with.

DAHLBERG: But Chishti says big-city shelters are running out of room, and putting these shelters in small towns is a tough sell. He says if current immigration trends continue and places like Alma don't allow shelters for unaccompanied children, the

federal government will struggle to follow its own laws and guidelines on how to care for migrant kids. For NPR news, I'm Brett Dahlberg in Alma, Mich.

(SOUNDBITE OF YONDERLING AND FEVERKIN'S "SUNROOM")

Copyright © 2021 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our [website terms of use and permissions pages at www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) for further information.

NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by an NPR contractor. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Accuracy and availability may vary. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.



Sign up for NPR's Up First newsletter.

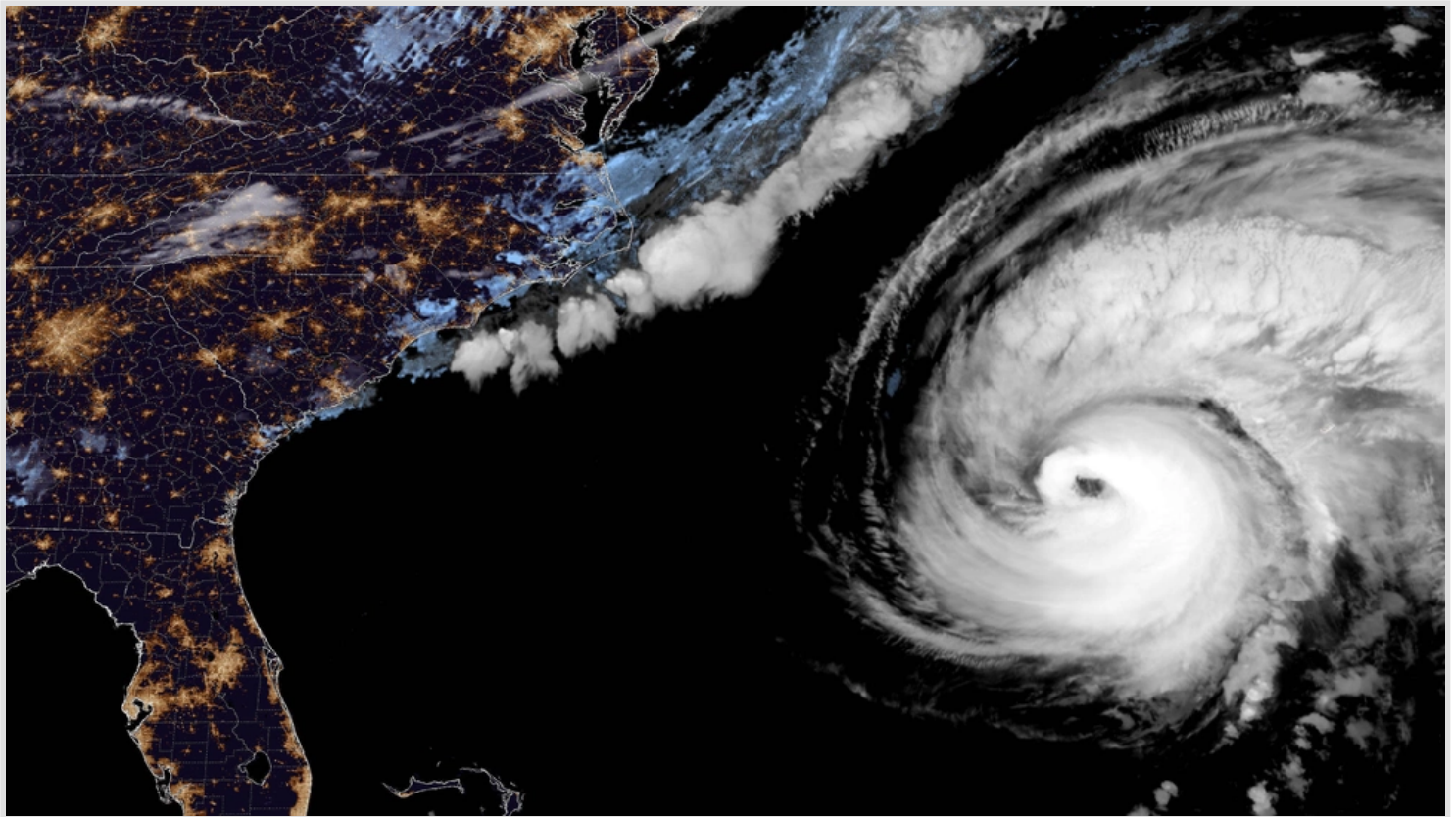
The news you need to start your day. Nothing more, never less.

SUBSCRIBE

[See more subscription options](#)

By subscribing, you acknowledge and agree to NPR's [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).
NPR may share your name and email address with your NPR station. [See Details](#).

More Stories From NPR



CLIMATE

Atlantic hurricane season is now predicted to be "above-normal" this year, NOAA says



HISTORY

The Lavender Scare



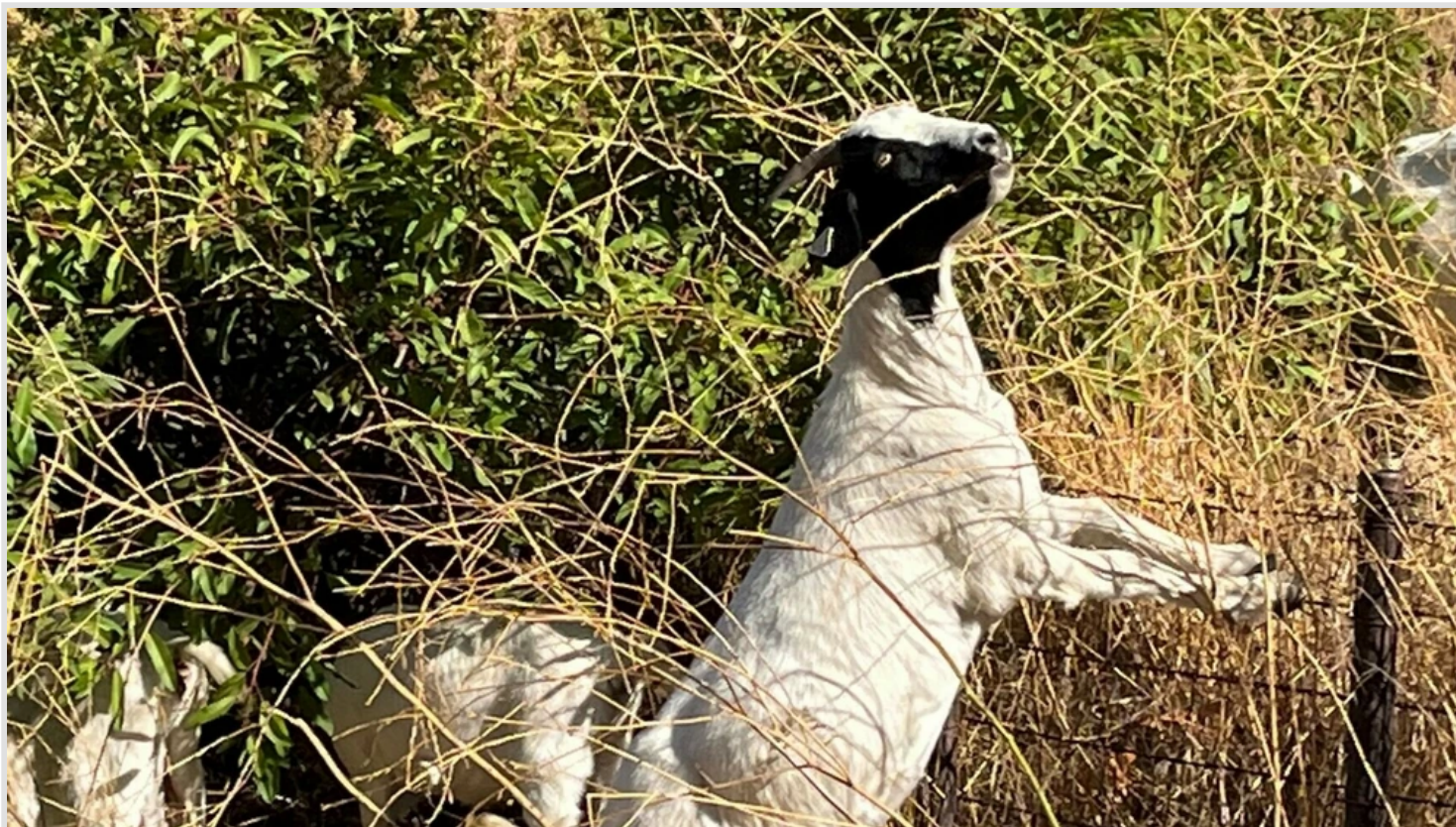
NATIONAL

Satellite images show utter devastation from wildfires in Maui



NATIONAL

Hollywood strikes' economic impacts are hitting far beyond LA



ENVIRONMENT

In California, wildfires are prevented by crews of unlikely firefighters: goats



POLITICS

Man accused of threatening Biden shot and killed in FBI raid in Utah

Popular on NPR.org



RELIGION

He was a top church official who criticized Trump. He says Christianity is in crisis



ENVIRONMENT

The toughest plastic bag ban is failing: A tale of smugglers, dumps and dying goats



HEALTH

How a trial in Texas changed the story of abortion rights in America



NATIONAL

Texas abortion bans are back in place after state appeals judge's order



CLIMATE

After decades, a tribe's vision for a new marine sanctuary could be coming true



CULTURE

Six takeaways from Disney's quarterly earnings call

NPR Editors' Picks



CULTURE

I've spent my career explaining race, but hit a wall with Montgomery brawl memes



WORLD

Iran has moved some American prisoners to house arrest — a step to possible release



WORLD

Inside Russia's attempts to hack Ukrainian military operations



MUSIC FEATURES

How LA proved hip-hop could go global – by staying thoroughly local



BUSINESS

Inflation got a little higher in July as prices for rent and gas spiked



CULTURE

Coach parent Tapestry and Versace owner Capri fashion a \$8.5 billion merger

READ & LISTEN

Home

News

Culture

Music

Podcasts & Shows

CONNECT

Newsletters

Facebook

Instagram

Press

Public Editor

Corrections

Contact & Help

ABOUT NPR

Overview

Diversity

NPR Network

Accessibility

Ethics

Finances

GET INVOLVED

Support Public Radio

Sponsor NPR

NPR Careers

NPR Shop

NPR Events

NPR Extra

[terms of use](#)

[privacy](#)

[your privacy choices](#)

[text only](#)

© 2023 npr