

Denver Migrants Spending and the City Budget

Author: DJ Summers

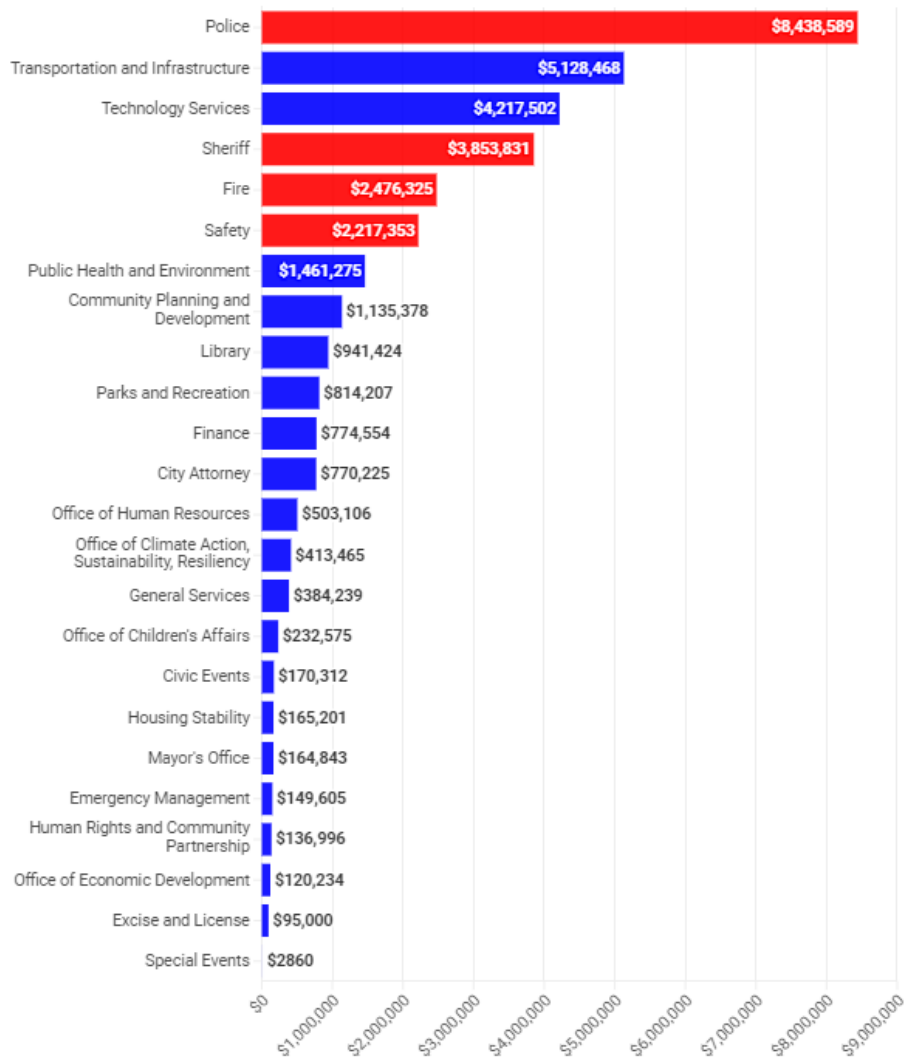
Denver Mayor Mike Johnston is proposing \$45 million in cuts to the city budget to fund a migrants response program the city projects will cost \$90 million through 2024.

Figure 1

The proposed cuts come from all over the city's departments and offices. The largest share, over \$17 million, however, comes from cuts to public safety. Johnston is proposing \$8.4 million cut from the Denver Police Department budget, \$3.9 million from the Denver sheriff, \$2.5 million from the Denver Fire Department, and \$2.2 million from the Department of Public Safety budget. (Figure 1).

The police cuts evaporate a previously budgeted plan to add new police recruits, cutting more than the city had been planning to spend on additional recruitment. "We know Denver has seen historic increases in crime and residents are frustrated that law enforcement doesn't have the capacity to respond to the volume of 911 calls," according to a city budget report. "That is why we are making an \$8.2 million investment to add 167 new police recruits to our force in 2024."

Proposed Denver Budget Cuts for Migrants Response



Source: 9News

Cuts come in an era wherein DPD’s budget has grown slowly relative to other city departments. Between 2013 and 2021, the Denver Police Department’s budget grew at the fourth-slowest rate among department budgets (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Governmental Activities Expenses, Values Expressed in \$ Millions											
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Chg. 2013 to 2021	% Chg. 2013 to 2021
General Government	\$262	\$319	\$340	\$406	\$446	\$475	\$553	\$594	\$651	\$389	148.2%
Public Safety	\$564	\$592	\$589	\$688	\$708	\$671	\$724	\$855	\$805	\$242	42.9%
Transportation & Infrastructure	\$165	\$193	\$191	\$217	\$254	\$280	\$378	\$306	\$351	\$186	113.0%
Human Services	\$115	\$115	\$125	\$146	\$167	\$177	\$164	\$159	\$165	\$50	44.0%
Health	\$54	\$59	\$65	\$65	\$62	\$61	\$112	\$130	\$129	\$75	137.7%
Parks & Rec.	\$89	\$80	\$69	\$94	\$100	\$118	\$112	\$107	\$114	\$25	27.7%
Cultural Activities	\$123	\$129	\$132	\$131	\$158	\$157	\$169	\$124	\$148	\$24	19.8%
Community Development	\$35	\$40	\$45	\$49	\$53	\$72	\$65	\$179	\$172	\$137	390.7%
Economic Opportunity	\$21	\$21	\$20	\$15	\$12	\$1	\$10	\$12	\$15	-\$6	-27.6%
Interest on Long-Term Debt	\$70	\$66	\$63	\$63	\$64	\$63	\$74	\$61	\$56	-\$14	-20.6%
Total	\$1,499	\$1,615	\$1,639	\$1,872	\$2,024	\$2,075	\$2,362	\$2,528	\$2,607	\$1,108	73.9%
Denver Police Department*	\$194	\$209	\$209	\$212	\$218	\$232	\$246	\$254	\$269	\$75	38.4%
Denver Public Schools*	\$795	\$853	\$893	\$928	\$1,054	\$1,080	\$1,133	\$1,182	\$1,249	\$540	76.1%

Source: Community Report – City and County of Denver (opencities.com)
 * Spending by the Denver Police Department is included in the Department of Public Safety’s total budget

[Previous CSI reports](#) have tracked Denver’s crime data.

According to the latest FBI data, Denver ranks high for crime among 226 cities with populations over 100,000. It ranks in the top 10% in seven of the ten crime categories - 3rd in property crime, 4th in motor vehicle thefts, and 20th in both aggravated assault and overall violent crime.

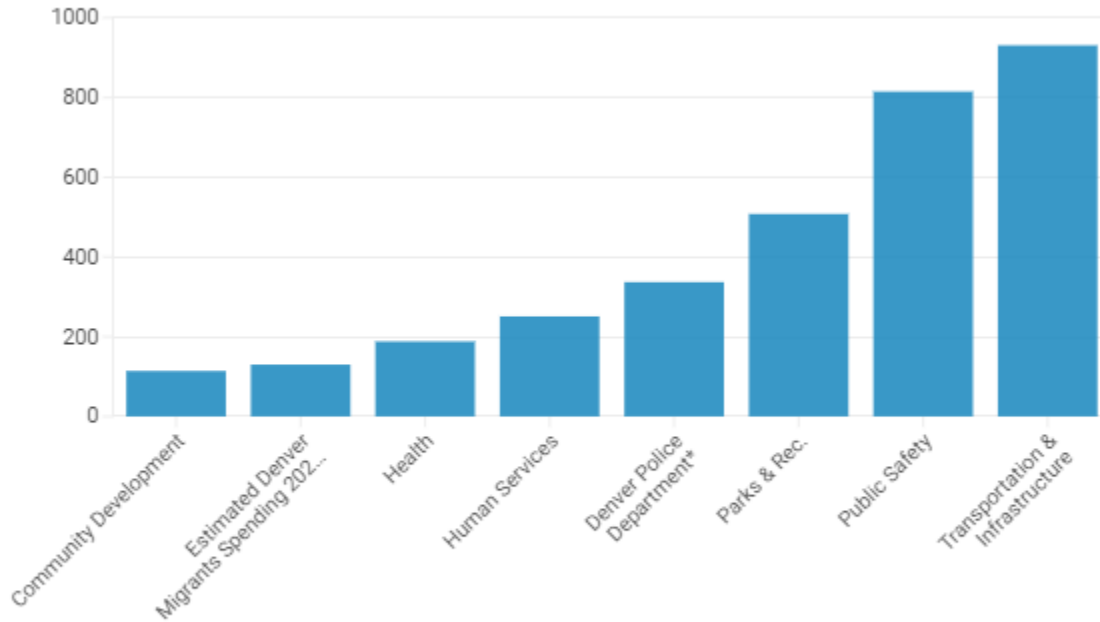
To date, the city has spent an estimated \$64 million in migrant response. It spent roughly \$40 million in 2023 and estimates it will spend \$90 million in 2024 for a total of \$130 million to date.

At the spending levels of the last two years, the city’s response to migrants amounts to the Denver budget for an entire department, albeit a small one. It is roughly half the Denver Police Department’s budget. In 2024, the Denver Department of Community Development has a proposed budget of \$114 million (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Denver City Departments' Budgets and Migrant Spending 2020-24

In Millions (\$)



2024 are projected figures



This does not include the spending from other government, private, and non-profit organizations, which previous CSI reports have estimated at \$170 million for the Denver metro area.

This is confirmed from actual dollars from the state government. Gov. Jared Polis signed a bill on April 18 that gave \$24 million in state funding to patch up a funding shortfall among the Colorado public school districts. Districts have absorbed several thousand migrant students since December 2022, many of whom were matriculated after the October 2023 count date that determines annual state funding.