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A home built in Wrentham under the state's affordable housing 40B program. (Photo by Michael Jonas)

HEALTH / HOUSING

Mass General Brigham backs real estate transfer fee

Hospital system says health, housing are linked

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MASS GENERAL BRIGHAM, the state's largest private employer, on Wednesday urged passage of legislation that would allow Massachusetts communities to assess fees on higher-end real estate transactions to support the construction of more housing.

“Health and housing are inextricably linked, and research has demonstrated the connection between housing stability and health outcomes,” said Elsie Taveras, the hospital system's health equity officer, in a statement. “The lack of affordable housing, and other social determinants of health, plague many neighborhoods disproportionately-particularly communities of color-leading to alarming health disparities. Failure to address these root causes during COVID-19 could further exacerbate these inequities.”

The legislation Mass General Brigham endorsed would allow municipalities to adopt a real estate transfer fee ranging in size from 0.5 percent to 2 percent on real estate transactions above a level set by the community but no less than the statewide or county medium for single-family sales.

The legislative endorsement by Mass General Brigham follows an announcement in October that it was distributing \$50 million over the next five years to community partners outside the hospital system who would help address mental health care shortages, chronic disease, and food insecurity.

Mass General Brigham rarely takes stands on high-profile public issues, but it is major player on Beacon Hill. The hospital system for years has been one of the biggest lobbyists on Beacon Hill. In 2020, it spent \$629,943 on lobbying, ranking fourth in expenditures behind the Massachusetts Health and Hospitals Association, the Massachusetts Association of Health Plans, and the Massachusetts Nurses Association. In the first half of 2021, Mass General Brigham reported spending \$292,784, making it the third largest spender on lobbying on Beacon Hill.

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