

Vineyard housing coalition to hold rally at the State House

By **Sam Houghton** - February 21, 2023



Massachusetts lawmakers are working to pass legislation that would extend the option for town and regional governments across the Commonwealth to hold meetings remotely.

The coalition spearheading the creation of a real estate transfer fee for Martha's Vineyard will be busing Islanders to the Massachusetts State House for a rally in March to support housing legislation. The Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank is inviting the public to attend. They will supply free transportation on charter buses.

Organizers say the Thursday, March 23, rally is planned as businesses and towns are struggling to hire workers because of a lack of housing on the Island. "This is the best chance we've ever had to change course," said coalition steering committee member Abbie Zell. "We need everyone to help seize this moment."

The goal is to have as many people on the State House steps as possible, to show broad support for the legislation to state lawmakers.

Legislation recently refiled would give all cities and towns in Massachusetts the ability to charge a fee on high-end real estate. Martha's Vineyard — after successfully passing the request at all six town meetings last year — also has legislation filed that would create the transfer fee for the Island.

The plan pitched at town meetings would create a housing bank — similar to the Island's Land Bank — that would provide a 2 percent tax on real estate sales over \$1 million; only the amount above \$1 million would be taxed. Revenue would help build housing, give supplements to families struggling to afford a down payment, and fund other housing-related

efforts. The housing bank coalition estimates it could generate \$12 million annually.

The bill failed to pass the last legislative session, but representatives with the coalition say there's momentum building, with more cities and towns — like Boston and Somerville — pushing for the transfer fee. Gov. Maura Healey has expressed support as well, unlike the former governor, Charlie Baker.

For March 23, coalition administrator Noah Lipnick says they are asking local businesses to help where they can, like giving workers a paid day off to attend the rally. Some businesses, like Cronig's Market, have already pledged to send some workers. Some towns are considering sending employees as well, coalition members say. Lipnick said they are looking for a good representation of the Island's diverse community.

As of last week, about 60 people had RSVPed for transportation. And there's a broad range of ages represented, from as young as 5 up to 85.

The coalition will charter buses that will leave on the 7 am ferry from Vineyard Haven; they will get the 5 pm ferry back to the Island. The coalition will provide lunch, refreshments (including coffee), as well as a free T shirt.

Lipnick says it's important that Islanders show up for the rally. "This trip is about preserving and protecting the health and security of our community. Without doctors, without firefighters, without police officers, where are we?" Lipnick said. "This is what our trip is about — encouraging our legislators to hear our calls, and to ensure that we are able to establish a local option transfer fee and housing bank on Martha's Vineyard."

Anyone hoping to participate can RSVP at ccmvhb.org.

