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LETTERS

On Cape and Islands, housing crisis becomes public safety crisis

Updated July 21, 2023, 2:10 a.m.



Hyannis firefighter and paramedic Jack Riley rushed to an emergency call this month. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The housing crisis is an increasingly dangerous public safety crisis ([“Cape strained with firefighters priced out,”](#) Page A1, July 12).

In my profession and in particular on the isolated island of Martha's Vineyard, there is a matrix that takes into account predictors of an individual's success in our community: a connection to family, access to educational opportunities, access to mental and physical health options, a good-paying job, and, paramount, affordable sustainable housing.

We are seeing our ranks in fire, law enforcement, EMS, and 911 dispatchers dangerously declining, with recruitment and retention at what seem to be all-time lows. This is not driven by a lack of desire to enter these honorable professions or by uncompetitive wages or benefits; it is predicated on an inability to acquire long-term affordable housing.

The Dukes County Sheriff's Office starting salary is around \$60,000, the island's [average household income is about \\$139,000](#), the [average price of a home is \\$2 million](#), and [according to one estimate](#), the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment, if you can find one, is \$2,600 per month. The way forward is clear: affordable housing now and a local option to levy a housing bank transfer fee are the vehicles for sustainability.

Allowing communities to levy a real estate transfer tax on high-value properties is a solution [the Globe editorial board strongly endorsed](#) last month.

In any crisis there is a red line we should never cross — it is when public safety is compromised. We have crossed that line.

Robert W. Ogden

Sheriff, Dukes County

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