

THE DUKES COUNTY HEALTH COUNCIL

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Housing legislation for the Commonwealth that would greatly benefit Martha's Vineyard has been proposed and is currently being discussed at the State level. The legislative proposals include House Bill H1377 and H2895 and Senate Bill S868. These bills would empower cities and towns to adopt a fee on certain real estate transactions that will go into a fund marked explicitly for affordable housing. The Dukes County Health Council urges the passage of this legislation, as affordable housing is a cornerstone of a healthy community.

Housing insecurity on Martha's Vineyard has been an issue for many years. As an island, Martha's Vineyard is in a particularly difficult position when it comes to affordable housing resources and permanent shelters. Affordable housing is essential to the health and wellness of individuals and families and is one of the most critical determinants of a healthy community. Lack of affordable housing consumes individuals with concern about their fundamental survival, lowering their chances of success.

It is essential to the health of our community that we address the Island's housing issues to create stable living conditions for our residents across their life spans. On-island, it has been documented that homelessness and housing insecurity (home instability) impact academic achievement (ACE scores), self-esteem, increases risky behavior, and diminishes social connections among our youth.

Affordable on-island housing is a year-round challenge. However, the current need exponentially increases with the onset of summer and the demand for affordable housing for the additional workers to staff summer positions. The increase in the summer population is essential to support the Island's economy. To meet the needs of this population increase, we also need an additional number of qualified providers in all support areas, including but not limited to medical personnel, law enforcement, EMTs, and firefighters. We must address "Housing Insecurity" if we are to remain a healthy community.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has worsened this already challenging problem. The affordable year-round housing inventory is at an all-time low. The MV housing market topped a billion dollars in sales in 2020, and it has left many individuals vital to our workforce without access to permanent affordable housing.

It is, therefore, essential to the overall health and well-being of the Island community that this issue be addressed regionally, with long-term planning and reliable funding. The Dukes County Health Council unequivocally endorses the goal of the Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank to establish a regional housing bank, funded by a transfer fee, for the Island of Martha Vineyard.

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