

THE DUKES COUNTY HEALTH COUNCIL

Dukes County

PO Box 190, Edgartown, MA 02539

Phone: (508) 696-3840 Fax: (508) 696-3841

<https://www.dukescounty.org/health-council>

The Dukes County Health Council, a network of professionals, that addresses a full array of health-related issues on Martha's Vineyard and facilitates conversations among key stakeholders, advocates for education, and supports community action, urges support for sustainable housing, as affordable housing is a cornerstone of a healthy community. Therefore, I am writing in support of the Southern Tier project as an essential addition to beginning to address the growing issue of inadequate housing.

Housing insecurity on the 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 important determinants of a healthy community. If they consumed by concern with their fundamental survival, the lack of affordable housing undermines the ability of individuals to succeed.

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. It has been found that Housing insecurity impacts student's ACE Scores, mental health and increases risky behavior. It has been documented, on-island, that homelessness and housing insecurity (home instability), impacts academic achievement, self-esteem, enhances risky behavior, and diminishes social connections among our youth.

Affordable on-island housing is a year-round challenge. The existing need, however, 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, the island also needs an additional number of qualified providers in all support areas, inclusive of, medical personnel, law enforcement, EMTs and fire fighters, who all require housing. The increase in providers also means a need for an increase in available housing to meet the demands of our community and provide adequate year-round services across the life span. Therefore, we must address "Housing Insecurity" year-round if we are to remain a healthy community.

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 continues to escalate leaving many individuals vital to our work force without access to permanent affordable housing. It is essential that we, as a community, support the "Southern Tier" affordable Housing proposal to provide safe adequate housing to the residents of our community and provide housing for those who provide essential services and to the families in our community. It is, therefore, essential to the overall health and well-being of the Island community that this issue be addressed with long term planning and reliable funding, to guarantee that providers of

essential services, have access to adequate housing at a reasonable cost year-round. Therefore, the Dukes County Health Council unequivocally endorses the Southern Tier project as essential to the health and welfare of our communities.

Mary Jane M. Williams RN, BS, MS, MSN, PhD.
Chair, Dukes County Health Council
Professor Emeritus, Central CT State University