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Subject: Norfolk Registry of Deeds CIO

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To: rkennedy@medfield.net

Mr. Kennedy:

As a practicing attorney who lives and works in the town of Medfield, I am writing to you today as a Norfolk County Advisory Board Member to urge you to support a continuing onsite permanent Chief Information Officer for the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds. As you know, the Registry of Deeds is the repository of records of all real estate and the ownership thereof as well as the plans therefor for all property in the County of Norfolk dating back to 1793.. It is critical that the Registry records be protected and reinforced. Real estate professionals, lenders, attorneys and homeowners rely on the accuracy and security of those records. Unfortunately, however, to date, the Norfolk County Commissioners have not as yet seen fit to replace the Chief Information Officer who retired last June 30, 2021. As you may or may not know, Norfolk Registry of Deeds, along with several other registries, including Plymouth and Bristol County, all have their own inhouse Chief Information Officers. But for the fact that the previous Chief Information Officer retired in June, we might not be in this situation now. For whatever reason, the Norfolk County Commissioners have delayed on making any decision with regard to the appointment of a new Chief Information Officer despite expressed support for a permanent onsite CIO from the towns of Bellingham, Millis, Dedham and Norwood. Medfield should similarly support this appointment.

The situation has been further exacerbated by the fact that in mid-January, the acting Chief Information Officer resigned because he was looking for some job assurance that he would have a full-time position. Since no permanent position has been agreed upon or funded by the Norfolk County Commissioners, Register William O'Donnell has not been able to find someone to accept the position unless they would be assured of a full time job. When Register O'Donnell last found someone who was interested in the position, that person indicated that she would only take the position if it was to be made permanent.

I think that you can clearly understand that in this day and age, technology is really the foundation of record keeping at agencies like the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds. Given the complexity of the situation and the volume of transactions that occur ever year and the huge backlog of records going back to 1793, I think it is easy to understand why having a Chief Information Officer on staff at the Registry is both essential and critical to ensure the safety of the services that the Registry renders. One only has to look at the news on an almost weekly basis to see situations where the information systems of relatively large entities such as the City of Quincy and the Massachusetts Steamship Authority systems have been hacked and/or been held hostage by unscrupulous people. Cyber Security in this day and age is an absolute must, particularly for an agency such as the Registry of Deeds. Technology overseen by a full time, onsite CIO is essential to maintain the integrity of the land records.

While I fully understand the obligations and duties of the Norfolk County Commissioners, I think both precedence (the Registry has had its own full time Chief Information Officer for approximately 30 years) as well as the fact that the funds taken in by the Registry on an annual basis are significantly more than its own operating costs. Supports the principal of the Registry having its own CIO. The excess funds generated are used to finance other county expenses. My understanding that is in fiscal year 2021 more than 80 million dollars were collected by the Registry that were used to support state and county programs as well. Accordingly, the financial burden of a full time Chief Information Officer is negligible. While I do not know any of the County Commissioners, I have to believe that since they have been stalling on this matter for so long that it has become a political issue and one or more of the Commissioners have their own political agenda. That, of course, is wrong in my opinion. They have a fiduciary duty to serve the county and look out for the best interests of the citizens of Norfolk County including insuring the security of the Norfolk County land records.

Arguments have also been made that by combining the Chief Information Officer's functions at the Registry with an offsite Chief Information Officer who has multiple duties would be a better way to go. I would suggest that, given the specialized function of the Registry, and the critical importance of the records that it maintains, that that is not an appropriate way to proceed. Furthermore, in case of a problem or a cyberattack, if the designated person is offsite or dealing with problems in another agency, then the Registry of Deeds may not receive the immediate attention it needs and any manner of damage could be caused to the Registry's record system. Furthermore, it provides an onsite contact person who individuals who use the Registry such as title examiners and attorneys and real estate agents if they call asking for assistance with the website or IT issues with the Registry system. It is important for each of the Registries to have their own dedicated Information Technology person onsite who is not only knowledgeable of the technology system, but also the nuances of a Registry operation and is able to respond quickly because that person is onsite. The Chief Information Officer will also be able to oversee, implement and update any disaster recovery plan that the Registry may have implemented. This has to be done on a ongoing basis in order to protect the integrity of the recording system.

I would urge you in the strongest possible terms to bring pressure to bear on the Norfolk County Commissioners to vote on their next meeting, which I believe is May 11, 2022, to appropriate funds for the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds for the purpose of again hiring a full time Chief Information Officer.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about what I consider to be a very important matter.

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