



November 8, 2021

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Re: Norfolk County Registry of Deeds

Dear Commissioners:

The Real Estate Bar Association for Massachusetts (REBA) urges a continuation of the dedicated IT staff at the Norfolk Registry of Deeds, including the hiring of a Chief Information Officer (CIO). This appointment is necessary following the retirement of the incumbent on June 30th. This on-site Registry CIO position reporting to the Register is a funded position that has been in existence at the Norfolk Registry of Deeds for over 20 years. The Norfolk Registry needs a full-time CIO.

Technology has been the foundation of the modernization initiatives that have been implemented over the years at the Norfolk Registry. Technology overseen by the Registry CIO is essential and critical for services to the users and stakeholders of the Norfolk Registry of Deeds.

REBA has been a long-time supporter of continuing technology improvements at all Registries of Deeds. We advocated for the dedicated revenue stream supported by a special recording fee technology surcharge that was passed in 2003. St. 2003, c.4. That same legislation created an advisory group to make recommendations for expenditures from the Registers Technological Fund (for the 13 state run registry districts) and the County Registers Technological Fund (for the county run districts). From the beginning REBA has had two designees to serve on that advisory group.

Not to diminish the importance of other Norfolk County budget priorities, please note that the Registry contributes significant funds – well in excess of its own operating costs - to finance other county functions. Over \$81 million dollars in FY 2021 collected at the Norfolk Registry support those other county functions, and state programs as well.

Real estate professionals and their clients – homeowners, lenders and other businesses – have come to rely on the Norfolk Registry staff for their professionalism and service. The experienced oversight provided by the CIO staff at the Norfolk Registry is essential.

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The IT staff of the Secretary of State do a good job managing IT maintenance for the state-operated Registries, but they do not have the relationships with local conveyancers and title examiners that our county Registries have. If our member attorneys and examiners try to reach out to the Secretary's staff to get updates on an outage at a particular Registry district, they may receive a generic answer that provides no detail concerning the outage, including how long before resolution. This is frustrating for our members and their clients.

If the decision not to fund dedicated IT staff at the Norfolk Registry were to stand, will the central County IT department provide the same level of customer service to the attorneys and examiners who make use of the Registry every day? Are they prepared for daily phone calls asking for assistance with the website, and emails asking for status updates on outages? Importantly, the Secretary of State has the IT support for the Registries separate from all other state IT departments to properly provide the necessary services to the state-run Registries so that outages are minimized, and the Registry staffs can provide quick responses to issues. Will the central Norfolk County IT recognize the importance of the Norfolk Registry's system and give it the priority that it deserves? The Secretary of State certainly recognizes the priority standing of his Registries.

In addition, we believe that most state-run registries still have at least one dedicated IT staff person on site for localized computer hardware issues. There are day-to-day needs on an IT level that need someone who is present, knowledgeable and able to respond quickly. Issues experienced by our members when the Norfolk IT staff have been helpful are varied. IT staff have been able to access attorneys' computers remotely to address problems manually.

We are concerned for other systemic issues, as well: Will the back-ups for the records in Norfolk also be centralized? If so, how will this affect the Registry's current disaster recovery plan?

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.



Peter Wittenborg

Very truly yours,



Neil D. Golden

Cc: REBA Board of Directors