

I am a resident of the City of Newport and have been, on and off, for roughly 15 years.

When we first came to the island, we were lucky to have a military housing allowance that made living here affordable. While there were certainly short term rentals around, it wasn't every other home in your neighborhood being rented out for a nightly - week long stay.

Military service took us away for a period, but when we were able, we were happy to return, this time, with no housing allowance, and an increase in Airbnb/VRBOs snapping up available housing. We'll add in the complicating factor of a 165-lb English Mastiff and I don't think I have to tell you that our housing options were in short supply. For double the cost of rent not three years earlier, we were able to secure a one bedroom apartment after months of searching. The apartment was not well maintained, with plumbing and mold issues in the bathroom. Add in that wages in Rhode Island are laughably low compared to our Western and Northern neighbors, and frustration was mounting.

We began to make plans to buy a home. Eight months of offers that were beat out by well funded short term rental investors finally ended in us closing on a house in Portsmouth that had remained on the market for many months. Likely due to basement flooding during storm events, as we soon discovered. We remained in the home until my Covid-era remote job demanded that we relocate to its HQ if I wanted to keep my position. We listed the house. Offers from short-term rental investors were VERY tempting. Ten thousand dollars above asking (a lot at the time, would probably be much more now) with additional compensation for leaving our furniture and household items so it would be "plug and play."

We resisted temptation and sold to a local person who intended to live in the home, but people who are in financial situations more dire than ours likely did not and would not make that choice.

I left my position with the out of state organization two years later. Frankly because I wanted to come "home" to Aquidneck.

This time? Our rent is equal to what we paid for a 1100square foot, 2 bedroom 1.5 bath single family home with required flood insurance for a second floor, 1 bedroom apartment. It will go up when we renew our lease early next year. It is unlikely we will ever be able to afford to buy on the island again, and now I find myself regretting selling our home in Portsmouth.

Short term rentals are keeping working families like ours from finding reasonably priced housing, whether to rent or to buy. The fallacy of a "local family just trying to run a short term rental business" is a joke. Rentals sit empty because the investors don't care. The money is meaningless to them, they're happy to just claim a loss on their taxes. The majority of people who work for our city government can't afford to live here. God knows the people who keep this place running in the service industry can't. If eliminating new short term rentals in the future makes it even slightly more affordable for Aquidneck residents, you will have made a huge difference in people's lives. I implore you to give their voices as much weight as those whose pockets are much deeper.

Thank you for your time.

Erin Murdock
Resident of Newport