

Short-Term Rental Law - Key Provisions

January 2019

On December 28, 2018, Governor Baker signed into law Chapter 337 of the Acts of 2018, "An Act Regulating and Insuring Short-Term Rentals" ("Act"), which Act, among other things, replaced sections 1-6 of G.L. c.64G with 11 new sections. These are the key provisions of the new law:

- **Applicability.** The term "short-term rental" as defined in G.L. c.64G, §1 means renting rooms, apartments, houses, or other units, to be occupied for a period of no more than 31 consecutive calendar days, and excluding hotels, motels, lodging houses and bed and breakfast establishments (four or more rooms to rent, with breakfast). Not included in the definition of a "short-term rental" is a "bed and breakfast home", defined as "a private, owner occupied house with up to three rooms to let, with breakfast included."
- **State Registration.** Operators of short-term rentals are required to register with the Department of Revenue and, pursuant to G.L. c.62C, §67, obtain a certificate of registration. The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development will maintain a registry listing all registered certificate holders in the lodging industry, including short-term rentals, with short term rental locations identified only by street name and municipality.
- **State Excise Tax.** The existing room occupancy excise tax statute, G.L. c. 64G, §3, was amended to include short-term rentals. The state room excise tax remains at 5.7%, provided that no tax may be imposed if the rent is less than \$15 per day. Note that operators renting out their property for a period of 14 days or less in one calendar year are exempt from this tax.
- **Local Option Excise Tax.** The local option room occupancy excise tax, G.L. c.64G, §3A, has also been amended to apply to short-term rentals. This local option allows a municipality, by vote of its legislative body, to adopt and establish a local tax of up to 6% of the total amount of the rent per stay, up to 6.5% in Boston, subject to the same exclusions as the state excise tax. ***Importantly, municipalities that previously accepted G.L. c.64G, §3A need take no further action to apply the local option room occupancy excise to short-term rentals. If a municipality seeks to change the existing local option tax rate, however, local legislative action will be required.***
- **New Local Options.** Municipalities that have adopted the local option room occupancy tax may also consider adoption of two new local options. A municipality that accepts G.L. c.64G, §3D(a) by a majority vote of its legislative body may impose a community impact fee on short-term rental operators of up to

3% of the total amount of each stay. The fee applies only to operators that own at least two rental units in the municipality, which units are detached from the operator's primary residence (unless that residence is in a structure containing four or more units). By separate vote, a municipality may also adopt G.L. c.64G, §3D(b), to make that fee applicable to units located within a two or three-family dwelling that includes the operator's primary dwelling.

NOTE: The municipality must dedicate at least 35% of the revenue from these two new local option fees to affordable housing or local infrastructure projects.

- *Cape and Islands.* In Barnstable, Dukes, and Nantucket Counties, the law imposes an additional room excise tax of 2.75% to generate revenue for a Cape and Islands Water Protection Trust Fund for water pollution abatement projects. This surcharge is automatically applicable in Barnstable County and applicable in Dukes and Nantucket Counties in the manner set forth in the statute. Should towns wish to withdraw from the Fund, a mechanism is available.
- *Local Ordinances and Bylaws.* General Laws c.64G, § 14 authorizes municipalities to enact ordinances and bylaws to regulate operators of short-term rentals and to impose civil penalties for violations. Types of regulation described include: establishment of a local licensing or registration requirement, the "number of local licenses or permits issued", and "the number of days" in a calendar year a person may make short-term rentals available for rent; zoning; mandated health and safety inspections; and establishment of fees for necessary local administration of the short-term rental program.

Consistent with the Home Rule Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution, municipalities may enact local ordinances or bylaws containing provisions not enumerated in the Act provided that they are "not inconsistent" with the provisions of the Act. In addition, boards of health retain jurisdiction to enact health and safety regulations with respect to short-term rentals.

Cities and towns are also authorized to publish a "public registry" of all short-term rental accommodations offered for rent by registered operators within their limits, and may determine "what relevant information shall be listed, including where the accommodation is located."

- *Effective Dates.* The taxation portions of the Act will be applicable to short-term rentals commencing on or after July 1, 2019, but **will not** apply to contracts executed before January 1, 2019 for short-term rentals executed before January 1, 2019. The Department of Revenue is interpreting the July 1 effective date as excluding all rentals that begin June 30, 2019 or earlier, for the entire length of that rental.

Please contact Attorneys Joel Bard (jbard@k-plaw.com) or John Giorgio (jgiorgio@k-plaw.com) at 617.556.0007 with any questions concerning the Act.

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