

Dear Stewart Partners,

As this update is our last before Christmas, we wish all of you a safe and happy holiday. Stewart offices will be closed this Friday, December 24. If you have an urgent matter that requires attention on Friday, you may send an email to our underwriting staff at [massuwing@stewart.com](mailto:massuwing@stewart.com); we will be monitoring and responding to emails until 1 PM. Some banks and many businesses may also be closed or have reduced hours on December 24th, and so there's a heightened risk of wire fraud. It's a good time to remind your staff, clients and colleagues of the heightened risk given the Christmas holiday and reduced banking and business hours. We've linked a video, provided some resources, and set out some reminders on wire fraud prevention and awareness below.

In addition, this week's update includes information for our cross-border agents in Rhode Island about an increase in the conveyance tax, which takes place on January 1, 2022. Lastly, we are sharing a bit of forward-looking predictions about the real estate market in both Rhode Island and the Worcester area. Both areas landed in the top 10 list of markets expected to grow in 2022.

- *Wire Fraud Awareness and Prevention Tips*
  1. Be Vigilant! Communicate with all the parties in your transaction that wire fraud is a real risk and anyone who is wiring money should verify instructions prior to wiring funds. Buyers and sellers in a transaction may not know that the simple fact of being a party to a real estate transaction makes them a target. Wiring any money without confirming via a phone call to a known number is dangerous. As a reminder, a "known number" is NOT the number received via the text or email containing the wiring instructions.
  2. A Change in Wire Instructions is a Red Flag. Any change that you or your clients receive to change the original wiring instructions is a significant red flag and is likely fraudulent.
  3. Make sure you or your office are reachable by phone. It is important that you and your office can be reached during business hours to confirm instructions and to be alerted if there is a potential wire fraud. With people taking time off to get ready for the holidays, some calls to the front desk or main office line may end up in voicemail, with messages to be retrieved at a later date. Consider forwarding the main number to a staff member so that wires can be quickly confirmed, receipt of funds can be verified, and that in the unfortunate event of an attempted wire misdirection, that you can be reached and have the ability to respond quickly.
  4. Slow down and make sure that protocols are followed. Cutting corners and skipping a verification process is what the fraudster is counting on. Make sure that everyone in your office knows (and follows) your process and procedures for sending and receiving wires and what to do in the event a wire is misdirected. This knowledge will minimize your risk.
  5. Ask for Disbursement Confirmation. When representing sellers who are expecting proceeds, arrange with the closing counsel that you are immediately notified when the wire is sent and request the wire confirmation. Communicate these instructions by phone or in writing when you deliver the closing documents.
  6. Examine Email Addresses. Look closely at email addresses, particularly messages that deal with money and funds. Don't assume the message is being sent by the sender, it could be a fraudster posing as the sender. Always assume that the bad guys are looking at your emails.

- *Stewart – Preventing Wire Fraud YouTube Video*

This video, produced by Stewart, is a short presentation explaining wire fraud, how it happens, and steps your clients can take to minimize their risk. To view the video, follow this link: <https://www.stewart.com/en/wire-fraud.html>

- *The Coalition to Stop Real Estate Wire Fraud*

Check out the resources, including video and print material, at The Coalition to Stop Real Estate Wire Fraud site at: <https://stopwirefraud.org/>

- *Rhode Island Conveyance Tax Increases as of January 1, 2022*

Effective January 1, 2022, Rhode Island's real estate conveyance tax under Rhode Island General Laws Chapter 44-25 will change, and as a result may increase the amount of conveyance tax which must be collected and paid at closing. Effective January 1, 2022, there will be an additional tax of \$2.30 for each \$500.00 of the consideration paid in excess of \$800,000.00.

Under current law, the real estate conveyance tax rate is \$2.30 for each \$500.00 (or fractional part thereof) of consideration paid for the purchase of real estate. The current law is a flat rate, applicable to every purchase, regardless of the amount of consideration. The new law increases the tax required to be paid for sales in excess of \$800,000.00. The additional tax is assessed only to the amounts over \$800,000.00

By way of example, effective January 1, 2022, if real estate is sold for \$900,000.00 the tax will be \$4,600.00. This figure is calculated by applying the rate of \$2.30 for each \$500.00 to the entire consideration of \$900,000.00 and then adding the additional tax of \$2.30 for each \$500.00 exceeding \$800,000.00:

$$[(\$900,000.00 \div \$500.00) \times \$2.30] + [(\$100,000.00 \div \$500.00) \times \$2.30] = \$4,600.00.$$

- *Providence/Warwick, RI and Worcester, MA are in the Top 10 Housing Markets for 2022*

Many predict that 2022 will remain a hot real estate market. In a recent report published by Realtor.com, two local markets landed in the top 10 markets positioned for growth in 2022. The ranking is based on a combined predicted percentage sales and price growth. The Providence/Warwick market has a predicted combined growth of 17.7% and the Worcester has a combined growth predicted to be 16.6%. According to the article, the overarching trends that drove the national forecast are visible in these markets. To read the complete article, follow this link: <https://www.realtor.com/research/top-housing-markets-2022/>

- *Stewart Holiday Schedule*

To allow our associates to celebrate with family and friends for the upcoming holiday, Stewart's offices will be closed on **Friday, December 24, 2021** and **Monday, January 3, 2022**.

- [Stewart's Massachusetts COVID-19 Resource Page & Information Page](#)

Our easy reference page, which provides you quick access to all our Mid-Week updates, gap coverage affidavits, and bulletins that specifically relate to COVID and other emergency orders, has moved. Save this URL as bookmark in your web browser for easy access: <https://www.stewart.com/en/state-pages/massachusetts-agents/underwriting-resources/covid-19.html>

**Stewart Title Guaranty Company - Massachusetts**

200 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 301, Waltham, MA 02451 Phone: 800-628-2988 Fax: 781-697-3336

Monarch Place - 1414 Main Street, Suite 1835, Springfield, MA 01144 Phone: 413-930-8090 Fax: 978-964-0565

**Tiziano Doto**, Agency Services Manager - [tiziano.doto@stewart.com](mailto:tiziano.doto@stewart.com)

**Jutta R. Deeney**, VP, State Counsel - [jutta.deeney@stewart.com](mailto:jutta.deeney@stewart.com)

**Shannon Coleman**, Underwriting Counsel - [scoleman@stewart.com](mailto:scoleman@stewart.com)

**Christine Provost**, Associate Senior Underwriting Counsel - [christine.provost@stewart.com](mailto:christine.provost@stewart.com)

**Tracie Kester**, Underwriting Counsel - [tracie.kester@stewart.com](mailto:tracie.kester@stewart.com)

**Paula M. Cuculo**, Underwriting Counsel - [paula.cucoulo@stewart.com](mailto:paula.cucoulo@stewart.com)

**General MA Underwriting Mailbox** - [massuwing@stewart.com](mailto:massuwing@stewart.com)

**Tracy Hawkins**, Agency Sales Representative Sr. - [tracy.hawkins@stewart.com](mailto:tracy.hawkins@stewart.com)

**Rita Kelly-Parsley**, Agency Sales Representative Sr. - [rita.kelly-parsley@stewart.com](mailto:rita.kelly-parsley@stewart.com)

**Tom Potito**, Agency Sales Representative Sr. - [tom.potito@stewart.com](mailto:tom.potito@stewart.com)

**Mary Blomerth**, Agency Sales Representative Sr. - [mary.blomerth@stewart.com](mailto:mary.blomerth@stewart.com)

**Lyslie A. DeMeo**, Agency Sales Representative, Sr. - [ldemeo@stewart.com](mailto:ldemeo@stewart.com)