



WILLIAM D. SESSOMS, JR.
MAYOR

City of Virginia Beach

VBgov.com

MUNICIPAL CENTER
BUILDING 1
2401 COURTHOUSE DRIVE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23456-9000
(757) 385-4581
FAX (757) 385-5699
wsessoms@vb.gov

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The Honorable Members of the Virginia Beach General Assembly Delegation

Dear Senators and Delegates:

Early last Sunday morning, April 24, a young man was shot and killed at a house party in Virginia Beach. Darren Campbell was just 20 years old and a student at Old Dominion University. He and his friends rented a house in the Oceana Gardens section of Virginia Beach, about three miles from the oceanfront, through the website Airbnb.

Rentals offered through sites like Airbnb are unregulated, unpermitted and operate without paying the occupancy tax all hotels pay. These rentals also escape the scrutiny from law enforcement, zoning, and safety inspectors that other hospitality and short-term rental properties receive. We must have appropriate local and statewide controls to effectively enforce standards, just as we do for properties that are legally permitted.

While the specific circumstances of the incident that led to the death of Darren Campbell remain under investigation, it is clear that the students rented the property—a center unit townhome located in a residential neighborhood—from the owner who is believed to be in China. The students hosted a large party at the property.

This was a tragedy for this young man, his family, friends and this community. As the newly formed study group appointed by the Virginia Housing Commission begins its work, I hope there will be opportunities for local input as I am sure other jurisdictions around the state are experiencing similar problems. We must be able to effectively regulate and enforce rules to govern rentals of private homes in our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

William D. Sessoms, Jr.
Mayor

WDS/jgh