

The Washington Post
washingtonpost.com

Metro

A Brief Matter of Style; Va. Senate Panel Bags Bill Outlawing Droopy Pants

Tara Bahrapour
Washington Post Staff Writer
966 words
11 February 2005

[The Washington Post](#)

FINAL

B01

English

Copyright 2005, The Washington Post Co. All Rights Reserved

A proposal to impose a \$50 fine on people who reveal their underwear in public died in the Virginia Senate yesterday, but according to young people who might have been affected, that "jont" was killed long ago.

Translation: The baggy pants trend already is fading on its own -- and the state legislature was a little late catching on.

During a hastily convened meeting yesterday, the Senate Courts of Justice Committee voted unanimously against the bill, which the House of Delegates had approved Tuesday. Proposed by Del. Algie T. Howell Jr. (D-Norfolk), it was aimed at anyone who publicly and intentionally "displays his below-waist undergarments, intended to cover a person's intimate parts, in a lewd or indecent manner."

Howell's aides declined to specify what kind of underwear was being targeted, how many exposed inches might be deemed lewd or who would decide what constituted an offense. But the proposal was broadly understood to refer to a tendency, generally among young men, to wear baggy pants that hang several inches below the waistline, exposing the top - - and sometimes a lot more -- of boxer shorts.

But at the mall and skate park this week, only a few kids were still showing much underwear, even in the warm weather.

"That was back in the days," said Abbas Kandeh, 19, a senior at Annandale High School who was strolling through Landmark Mall in Alexandria with friends. Their waistlines were concealed by long T-shirts, and their jeans were baggy but did not hang as low as they might have four years ago when, they say, the trend peaked.

"Nobody does it these days," Kandeh said.

School officials also said they have noticed waistlines on the rise after hitting a low several years ago. "It kind of seems like a fad that has passed us," said Tammy Ignacio, an associate principal at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria who is responsible for monitoring students' clothing.

That is not to say that anyone is about to return to 1980s-style peg-leg pants. Boys' jeans still tend toward the saggy, and the tops of undershorts still poke out, although these days they tend to be obscured by oversize T-shirts.

In fact, said Jaevon Thomas, 17, a sales clerk at Urban Styles, a hip-hop clothing shop at Landmark, boxers are now made to be seen. Pulling up his polo shirt, he displayed the top of a pair of red cotton boxers with "Tommy Hilfiger" printed on the front.

"Underwear are made to be accessories now," he said. "Underwear that matches your outfit, underwear that matches your clothes."

Grown-ups in the Virginia Senate said they took up the legislation yesterday largely to quell the international attention it had received (Howell's office has gotten phone calls from the media as far away as Israel and Australia) -- and express their concern that it posed constitutional problems. Before they killed the bill, several senators said they had received calls (including some from relatives) urging them to fight for the bill or admonishing them to focus on other matters.

"I would find this bill humorous or tolerable . . . but for the indignity of the, no pun intended, international exposure," said Sen. Thomas K. Norment Jr. (R-James City). "That this is what is being associated with the commonwealth of Virginia is unacceptable."

T.C. Williams senior Jessica Miller, 18, agreed. The day after the House voted in favor of the bill, she organized a group of students who were planning to protest the bill in front of Alexandria City Hall this weekend wearing their underwear over their pants.

"Everyone thinks it's a joke," said Miller, whose faded jeans read "Make Love, Not War" in ballpoint pen. "They're using words like 'lewd,' " she said. "War is lewd. Homelessness is indecent. Boxers showing -- that's tacky. It's not worth spending taxpayers' money on."



PRESS COVERAGE

For girls, she added, the bill would have posed a problem: Most jeans sold today are low-rise hip-huggers, a style that makes it hard to keep underwear from peeking over the top even if that is not the intent.

At American Eagle Outfitters, another clothing store at the mall, the best-selling girls' jeans are "Extreme Low Rise" and "Super Low Rise," low-cut hip-huggers often worn with thong underwear.

Victoria Martin, 19, a sales associate at the store, said she liked the idea of the bill . But when her manager pointed out that Martin's own red polka dot underwear was visible above her jean line, she smiled and acknowledged that staying legal might have been hard.

One person who was disappointed that the bill died is Marc Butlein, chief executive of Freshpair.com, the underwear company that started National Underwear Day (the second Wednesday in August) two years ago. On Wednesday, the company announced that it would send \$100 of underwear to anyone who got an underwear ticket. "Underwear today is not what it was 50 years ago," Butlein said. "Underwear is something that, quite frankly, has come out of the closet."

For teenage skateboarders at the Schuyler Hamilton Jones Skate Park in Alexandria, staying legal was not a concern. While none was showing underwear as they swooped up ramps and crashed on asphalt, as soon as they were told that the House had voted for the law, they knew what to do. One of them tugged his jeans down to a gravity-defying level. Displaying his backside, clad in blue and white checked boxers, he scooted his board along the ground, gained speed and sailed away.

Staff writer Chris L. Jenkins in Richmond contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com>

Document WP00000020050211e12b0005q