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Virginia's Droopy-Pants Bill Doesn't Hold Up

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It's still OK to show a smidgen of your underwear in Virginia.

State Delegate Algie Howell had introduced a bill that would make teenage boys -- and hip-hoppers of any age or sex -- liable for a \$50 fine if their baggy, drooping pants revealed their undergarments.

Like their shorts, the issue got immediate exposure. In fact, it ignited a worldwide firestorm. People wrote to Virginia legislators to tell them that forcing people to hitch up their pants would violate free expression, free speech, and other free things. Some critics said it was racist, since young African Americans are said to have started the trend. Never mind that Delegate Howell is a black man and a longtime civil rights leader. The feeling was: what right does a 67-year-old fossil have to tell us how to dress?

Lawmakers got the message. The saggy-pants bill was defeated -- unanimously -- in committee.

It dawned on the lawmakers in Richmond that the time to take a stand against low-hanging britches had passed a couple of decades ago. Kids' fashions have progressed -- or slid -- to the point that underwear today is not only out in the open?it's a hot fashion accessory. Boxers and briefs and thongs are now designed to match the rest of one's clothing. Designer names like Dee Jay and Tommy Hilfiger are stitched right onto the waistband. They're the first thing we all see, whether we like it or not, when loose-fitting pants start to slide south.

Indeed, kids' pants aren't usually so baggy any more. Today's hip-huggers are built to ride low. So low, they're called low-rise ? or even extreme low-rise. So underwear is peeking out ? legally -- all over Virginia.

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