

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 07-0329R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Holton, Young
Introduced and read first time: September 17, 2007
Assigned to: Public Safety Subcommittee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Department of Recreation and Parks, Youth
Commissioner, Police Commissioner, State's Attorney's Office

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **An Invitation to Engage in Constructive Dialogue – Baltimore City Youth:**
3 **Why Are Some of Your Pants Hanging So Low?**

4 FOR the purpose of inviting Baltimore City's youth to engage in dialogue with members of the
5 City Council, parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, members of the faith-based
6 community, juvenile justice professionals, and other interested parties to address the popular
7 practice of wearing certain kinds of clothing, such as baggy, low hanging pants, and other
8 fashions that adults find socially and esthetically objectionable; to explore the historical and
9 social implication of such practices that give rise to and reinforce negative stereotyping and
10 form the basis for society's objections; and to ascertain if legislation similar to that
11 introduced in state and local legislatures across the country is a desirable, meaningful, and
12 effective means of dealing with this and other issues that threaten to divide youth and adults
13 and impede young people from garnering the respect they desire and deserve.

14 **Recitals**

15 A popular fad among America's youth is wending its way across the country, followed
16 closely by state and local legislative attempts to, first, define the offensive behavior, and
17 secondly, to provide non-draconian sanctions to discourage youth from engaging in expressions
18 of personal style and adopting clothing fads that are deemed, by their elders, to be inappropriate
19 attire for appearance in public.

20 A Dallas, Texas School Board trustee sought to ban pants worn so low that underwear
21 shows. The town of Delcambre, Louisiana enacted a much broader ordinance to prohibit persons
22 "in any public place or in view of the public" from being "in dress not becoming his or her sex,
23 or in any indecent exposure of his or her person or undergarments." A City Council member in
24 Atlanta, Georgia proposed to amend that City's indecency laws to address a larger array of
25 sartorial offenses, making baggy pants that show boxer shorts, showing the strap of a thong
26 above the pant line, wearing jogging bras in public, or showing bra straps illegal.

27 On the state level, the Virginia House of Delegates reported favorably a bill that would make
28 it illegal to display "below-waist undergarments, intended to cover a person's intimate parts, in a
29 lewd or indecent manner." In Louisiana, a state bill that would have made it "unlawful for any

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

Council Bill 07-0329R

1 person to appear in public while wearing pants below his or her waist and thereby exposing his
2 or her skin or intimate clothing” failed after it was amended to exempt sagging pants worn by
3 workers, an amendment that was dubbed “the plumber’s amendment”.

4 Regardless of how the practice is defined, the objection to wearing pants “hanging down”
5 below the natural waist line is based on more than preference for a more traditional mode of
6 dress. Many parents object to their children adopting a style that emulates the behavior of
7 criminals. As reported by the Associated Press “sagging is believed to have originated with
8 California prison inmates who were denied belts and had to hold their trousers up. It spread to
9 hip-hop and “gangsta” rap culture and appeals to those who want to project a tough-guy image.”
10 Another version holds that California probationers and parolees began wearing baggy, loose-
11 fitting pants to conceal the GPS monitoring devices they were ordered to wear.

12 While personal expression and individuality are traits parents and adults encourage in
13 today’s youth, behaviors that perpetuate negative images and stereotypes are not. As we work to
14 provide positive role models and assist our cherished youth in the quest to become happy
15 healthy, contributing members of society, it is troublesome when the youth choose to, knowingly
16 or unknowingly, emulate behaviors of those who threaten the well-being of and prey upon the
17 law-abiding members of that society.

18 While youth and adults will not agree on every issue, we must respect those differences and
19 continue to respect each other. Keeping an open dialogue is the first step in gaining mutual
20 understanding and in possibly reaching a compromise on which all parties can agree. Let’s talk
21 about it!

22 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That this
23 Body hereby invites Baltimore City’s youth to engage in dialogue with members of the City
24 Council, parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, members of the faith-based community,
25 juvenile justice professionals, and other interested parties to address the popular practice of
26 wearing certain kinds of clothing, such as baggy, low hanging pants, and other fashions that
27 adults find socially and esthetically objectionable; to explore the historical and social implication
28 of such practices that give rise to and reinforce negative stereotyping and form the basis for
29 society’s objections; and to ascertain if legislation similar to that introduced in state and local
30 legislatures across the country is a desirable, meaningful, and effective means of dealing with
31 this and other issues that threaten to divide youth and adults and impede young people from
32 garnering the respect they desire and deserve.

33 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor; the
34 Governor; the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the Maryland General Assembly;
35 the Baltimore City State’s Attorney; the Baltimore Police Commissioner; Director, Baltimore
36 City Department of Recreation and Parks; Director, Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice;
37 Director, the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies; Director, Community Law Center, Inc.;
38 Dean, University of Maryland Law School; Dean, University of Baltimore Law School; and the
39 administrative offices of BUILD, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, BRIDGE, the
40 Baltimore Council of PTAs, the Baltimore and Vicinity AME Ministerial Alliance, the 40 West
41 Ministerial Alliance, CURE, the Baltimore Branch of the NAACP, the Baltimore City Council
42 Youth Commission, the Algebra Project, the Baltimore Education Network, Safe and Sound, and
43 the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.