



The Right to Dry

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Energy and Technology

February 28, 2008

10:30 PM

Legislative Office Building

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 5596 AAC THE RIGHT TO DRY

Co-Chair John Fonfara, Co-Chair Steve Fontana, Vice Chairs Duff and Nardello, and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully request that House Bill 5596, AAC the Right to Dry, be passed.

My name is Alexander Lee. I am the executive director of a small nonprofit organization called Project Laundry List. We began in 1995 and for twelve years, very few people paid attention. Last April, just before National Hanging Out Day, which is April 19th, the *New York Times* published a major story in the Style Section. It was the on the most emailed article list for over a week. Since that time, the *Wall Street Journal* has done a front-page story about a woman in Bend, Oregon (and our organization); *Time* did a full page story the day after Thanksgiving, which mentioned a retirement community in Concord, NH, that refused to change its rules (and mentioned our organization); and I have appeared on television and radio in New Zealand, Australia, Germany, and South Korea, to name but a few places that are paying attention to what we do.

The story of Susan Taylor, the woman from Bend who is a busy nurse and mother, is instructive. In order to change the rules in her community, which she has asked the property management company to do, she would need a fifty-one percent vote of the 800 households that belong to Awbrey Butte, her community. That is a lot of postage and effort just so that you might hang your clothes. One woman wrote to me from Texas and

said that it would take an 80% vote to change the rules in her community. I know in New Hampshire condo regs require a statutory minimum of two-thirds before a rule can be changed.

The story of Mary Lou Sayer, the elderly woman in Concord who wants to hang her clothes, brings attention to another problem. Our communities are no longer designed to accommodate the tasteful, discreet drying of clothes. Vancouver, British Columbia, and London, Ontario, are both thinking of requiring that space to dry be a design consideration for any new development. In Australia, they have a sophisticated energy management program where you can choose a clothesline as a way to bring down the overall carbon impact of your home.

The Community Association Institute and their lobbyists make the argument that a democratic process exists to change the rules or that you need not move to the place that prevents clotheslines. Except for a few freaks (and, believe me, I know them), this is not how people make their decisions about where to live. Changing the rules and getting into a tiff about diminishing property values with one's neighbors is not how most people want to spend their time.

In New Hampshire, the Community Association Institute testified that they are, quote, "very concerned" about the liability issues of clotheslines. Despite the fact that there are 15,600 dryer fires causing 5 to 15 deaths and \$99 million of property damage every year, they were concerned—*and this is the example that they used*—about a couple of knuckleheads who might walk their dog and run into a clothesline that had been erected in a common area. I am a lawyer myself, and after the NH hearing, I marched up to the Supreme Court law library and did a little research. The cases have been few and far between where a landlord, association, or municipality has been held accountable for what are usually egregious errors of judgment on the part of the clothesline user.

Anecdotally, you might be interested to hear this story sent to me by a host of New Zealand public radio, which had me on a couple weeks ago:

An off-duty prison officer who plunged from the balcony of his 10th-floor apartment escaped death when his fall was broken by a clothesline.

He fell nine floors but landed on a nylon-rope clothes rack on a first-floor balcony that acted like a safety net, preventing serious injury...

The moral of the story is that clotheslines can save lives. Allow me, now to address more seriously how they can save lives. They help us to avoid carbon emissions associated with the life-cycle of a dryer.

Electric dryers accounted for 5.8% of residential electricity use in 2001, according to the Energy Information Administration of the US Dept. of Energy. This statistic is misleading, though, because it does not include Laundromats, multi-family housing laundry facilities, or any of the commercial laundry establishments at places like universities, hotels, hospitals, retirement and nursing homes, fish piers, restaurants, or prisons, where we now house a couple million Americans. In fact, dryers account for a much larger percent of our energy use than that 6%, especially because that statistic does not take into account the roughly 16% of residential homes that use gas dryers, or the life cycle costs of a large white good that obsolesces every eleven or twelve years.

People are starving for something to do in the overwhelming face of climate change. Numerous psychological studies show that small behaviors lead to greater behaviors and that doing something, no matter how small, helps people overcome the fear that nothing can be done. Clotheslines are a gateway drug to better environmental behaviors and the people of Connecticut would be well-served if you lifted one of the most onerous barriers to their hanging out and to the quiet enjoyment of their property.

Not everyone can afford solar panels and a new Prius but everyone can afford a clothesline. For \$2.50 and a bag of clothespins, you can get started on hanging out your clothes...today. You don't have to wait.

It is a great irony that in New Hampshire the legislature was jumping up and down to require towns to permit small wind systems, but they would not do the same thing for clotheslines. It shows just how out of whack our priorities are.

Governor Jim Douglas of Vermont reputedly hangs out his clothes. We are proud of him for that, but everybody should be allowed to do the same thing. Leadership by example is powerful, but if the people are not allowed to follow, that is a problem.

In closing, I would like to make you aware of some ancillary benefits of the clothesline. Clotheslines save consumers money. Clothes hung outdoors smell better and they last longer. Where do you think lint comes from, after all? Sunlight is the best disinfectant and a great bleaching agent, eliminating the need for toxic detergents and whiteners. It is mild physical activity that allows people to plug-in to the weather patterns, nature, the birds and the neighborhood. Inside drying, at this time of year, can humidify your home, avoiding or diminishing the need for an additional appliance.

I would be happy to take any questions. Thank you.