

May 24, 2015

To: Federal Trade Commission

RE: The "Sharing" Economy: Issues Facing Platforms, Participants, and Regulators A Federal Trade Commission Workshop

Greetings,

Thank you for the opportunity to present my experiences with the sharing economy and the assault against our gracious efforts to host our guests.

For the past three and a half years, we have been hosting guests at our home. It has been a real pleasure and a successful endeavor because of the value we provide to travelers coming through our town. My husband and I both have a penchant for hospitality and receive joy extending it to travelers in our home. It is a very fulfilling. Furthermore, it provides a wonderful income

This source of income was of major

importance during this time.

Airbnb and other vehicles for the sharing economy is nothing other than a major marvel in innovation in the 21st century. The freedom of individuals to open their homes, and other living quarters to any "Joe" desiring to be hosted is a real breakthrough. The common homeowner/renter can enjoy the benefits of hosting /hospitality with financial rewards and a sense of purpose and pride in the endeavor. This is especially pronounced in the new vehicles like Airbnb because of the review system. Merit is a major player in this new platform. If you provide a "good stay", you receive "excellent reviews" and guests look at these reviews to determine where to stay. In addition, these vehicles provide wonderful methods to vet guests to ensure they are safe.

We live in a college town that is filled with property owners renting all kinds of houses to students. Many times these young people are piled into homes in large numbers and in all neighborhoods throughout the city. The need for student housing is big, thus the city officials goes out of their way to be as unrestrictive as possible. Students have been known to be some of the most inconsiderate neighbors. They are young and foolish, living for the first time on their own, and are often noisy and careless. Many do not have any interest in knowing their neighbors due to the temporary nature of their occupation in the home. All in all, they are particularly desirable neighbors. While there has been an assault on "homestay" rentals in homes in our city, there has not been one single comment in any public meeting or by any of our council people about the fact that these college tenants are completely unrestricted in any kind of rental. Why should these "known undesirable" tenants be allowed to rent any home, room, or studio, while cracking down with harsh draconian regulations on adult travelers on their best behavior knowing they are to be reviewed, that come to rent a room in our homes?

Many times this whole conversation by the advocates against homestay rentals focuses on the need to control who comes into our neighborhoods. They demand that cities make laws stopping these rentals to control the flow of strangers into them in the name of public safety and public standards. Is there any cry to restrict people from allowing friends and family to visit our homes? Is there any cry for monitoring who is allowed to rent long term? What about friends and family of renters? Why should anyone be allowed to come into a neighborhood unless vetted by the local government? These advocates demand this kind of legislation for homestay visitors but no other renters or visitors. What has happened to property rights in this nation? Why does the government have a right to tell us who we can have in our home visiting even if they pay us? Long term rentals are no different than homestay rentals except the first is stuck with the renter for a long time. There is zero conversation about clamping down to eradicate any kind of rentals except homestay. Why is this?

It begs the question, is the current status quo and crony mentality responding with protectionism to safeguard what they have from the new enriching options to the market place of hospitality for the common citizen? Furthermore, what business is it for the government to infringe on good citizen's freedoms of banning short term stays in our homes? This great nation, the United States of America, was founded on the core principles of freedom and individual property rights.

Furthermore, our nation, has at its core a philosophy of rewarding the great innovator, this nation understands merit. This kind of sharing economy is built on merit. Guests know about the host from their merit and the guest is judged by merit as well. What hotel checks your reviews before you stay? How many times have you stayed at a hotel to be awakened in the night with a loud person next door causing disruption. If that happened in homestay the guest would get a bad review and find themselves unable to come back to a future rental. Merit makes people into good neighbors. This is exactly the kind of model that fosters everything we value in this society. Innovation, merit, and community connectedness.

Moreover, this type of sharing economy is one of the most useful in the entire world in terms of sustainability. We are using existing structures to provide value to a traveler. There is no need to create new structures, it is a highly efficient way to provide more options for overnight travelers. In every city there are lovely homes, rooms, and studios that are empty most of the time because owners need use of them now and then for family so they decide not to rent them out long term. With homestay rentals, an owner can "host" guests in these existing spaces as needed at zero cost to the city's infrastructure. They can do this at the times they decide fluidly, thus allowing the owners friends and family that also visit to come visit as they did before in between "hosting". Since these spaces are on their own property it causes the personal responsibility of the owner to be high and therefore creates a lot of accountability for the type of guest that enters into the homes they are renting.

Finally, the relationships and friendships built through this vehicle between the host and guests are in themselves highly enriching, it is truly a wonder. What better way to show our hospitality than to invite people into our homes and give them an extra level of attention while they are visiting a city. This is like turning citizens into ambassadors for a city. This kind of hosting goes back through all of history. It is a new phenomena that we all stay in large hotel buildings full of rooms with no interaction with anyone

locally. Throughout history when travelers went to a city they would stay in the homes of people in the city known to have extra space. This is a way to connect and get direction, and meet people. There is nothing new about staying with locals in a town while traveling. The new part is the idea that you can book that room in advance after reading all about the local person, seeing pictures of the room, and even asking questions long before you get there. The other new thing is that the local host does not just get a knock on the door from the traveler. The local host, in advance, gets to read a profile of the traveler, reviews about other stays they have made, and hear about the trip they are on before ever agreeing to host them. This is the modern marvel of technology being applied to an ancient practice of hospitality.

In summary, we are citizens who would like the freedom to host and also to be hosted using the amazing new innovations created by the sharing economy. We will vote for people who understand that the world is changing. Technology is making things possible and politicians and bureaucrats cannot stop it. Just like cars pushed out the horse drawn carriage, there were a lot of blacksmiths and wheelwrights that fought to stop automobiles with these same arguments to public safety. Sharing existing resources through these services is a natural organic movement. It makes sense, and is completely green and sustainable with no local infrastructure costs. Standing interests fight this like blacksmiths fought cars. Don't be on the wrong side of history. Sharing is good and makes all the sense in all the world.

Thank you for your time.

Melanie Potter