

Dear Councilman Mike Bonin,

I'm writing you today to offer you my wholly positive experience sharing my home through AirBnB...

I live in a humble two-bed, one-bath bungalow in West LA, which I shared for many years with my now-ex-girlfriend Michelle. Making rent each month was not a problem when the two of us shared the front bedroom and used the back as an office and music room. But after the one-two punch of her departure and my being laid off from the *Times*, rent became much tougher to make. And finding a permanent roommate to split the bills proved impractical because my place is fairly small and already fully furnished.

That's where AirBnB has been a godsend. Without AirBnB, finding temporary roommates or boarders was an anxiety-inducing nightmare. Do you really want to trust the faceless, anonymous person looking for housing on Craigslist? Well, with AirBnB you don't have to, because it's a REAL COMMUNITY—like a Facebook for hosts and guests, where each can post a bio and photos and publish references and accumulate positive (or negative!) reviews. AirBnB is SAFE.

It's also a professional service that protects hosts and landlords from damage by holding a security deposit from guests, and by allowing the host to author his or her own set of house rules. And it makes collecting payments, which can be an uncomfortable situation, a snap.

Despite all this, I see that you've come out in support of California State Senate Bill 593, which would impose upon LA state-wide regulations on home-sharing that are unclear, outdated and ultimately too restrictive. I think perhaps with the recent hullabaloo in Venice, you've gotten the wrong impression about AirBnB and the majority of people that comprise it.

Most AirBnB hosts are like me. I don't actually turn a profit from my hosting duties; I pay thousands more in rent, food and utilities each year than I receive in total AirBnB revenue. AirBnB does massively help me defray my living expenses but what my guests pay to me I return by providing every amenity under the sun from wifi to a nice cup of coffee.

Plus, I serve as a virtual tour guide for my guests. I tell them where to go to eat, drink, shop, see, hear and play. Local business owners take in lots of extra dollars (and Euros and Yen and you name it!) thanks to my well-informed guests.

And in my case, I actually live with my guests, sharing the living room, kitchen and bathroom with them; it's a genuine home-sharing arrangement. And I do nothing to harm the local hotel/motel business. Yes, I do occasionally get short-term people who want to visit Los Angeles for a long weekend. But these are generally folks who couldn't afford a hotel, or want a real home with a kitchen, and wouldn't come to LA at all if it weren't for AirBnB!

This goes DOUBLE for my longer-term guests: People like Leandro Bremer who came from Brazil to study English in Santa Monica for a month; or Ana María Iglesias, a fledgling doctor who came from Spain to do two months of important stroke research at UCLA, where the dorms were all full up; or Caleb Hall, who came out from Kansas to do a low-paying but crucial summer internship at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Through AirBnB, I've built relationships with all these folks—mostly foreigners who got their first taste of the land, people and culture of not just Los Angeles but the United States while staying with me. And you know what? They LOVE it. As a result, I can say this with a straight face: A world with AirBnB thriving in every country would be a world with less war.

So for all these reasons, I ask you to please allow AirBnB and its members to flourish.

Seriously Mike, I'm one of those politically active guys who votes every time there's an election, knows who my representatives are and—more importantly—how they vote on issues I care about. I care about this.

Your constituent,
Liam Gowing