

March 23, 2023

Dear Chair Latz and Members of the Committee,

I am submitting this letter in support of SF1598. I am the owner of Tech Fixers LLC, an independent electronics repair shop in Shakopee, Minnesota.

Original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) erect roadblocks that prohibit or make it very difficult for owners or independent repair providers to repair their technology products. With innovation slowing, OEMs are looking to get maximum return from relatively small improvements. Phones, for example, change very little from one generation to another. Perhaps a slightly faster processor or an additional camera. For many this is not a good reason to replace the device. OEMs need to find other ways to shorten the lifespan of these perfectly usable devices. They do this by ending software support for older devices, implementing policies that make repair difficult, costly, impossible, or inferior, relying on known consumable components to make the devices worthless (e.g. batteries), and reducing the supply on the secondary market.

The following issues make repairs difficult.

- A lithium battery is only designed for 300-500 charge cycles before it starts degrading. On most modern products it is necessary to disassemble the product to replace it. On some, the battery is glued into the device. If this wasn't enough, certain OEMs use an embedded and paired microprocessor that uses a cryptographic key pairing to "protect" consumers from aftermarket replacements.
- Screens on some devices are paired as well, potentially causing loss of functionality when replaced. Examples include loss of True Tone and fingerprint reader functionality.
- Authorized repair providers are not very prevalent in less populated areas. In addition, these authorized centers often don't do the repairs. They simply send them to a larger facility and tell the owner it will be weeks for their device to be serviced. They can do this because people don't have much choice.

Many will say that repair providers can simply get authorized. My own experience says otherwise.

- The CTIA certification program called WISE (Wireless Industry Service Excellence) requires high fees which do not actually get you any sort of authorized status with OEMs. In addition, you are explicitly forbidden from doing more advanced repairs such as those requiring soldering.
- We were not eligible for the authorized program with one large OEM for several reasons including that we must have techs get certified on products we did not intend to repair. They required prime retail space, audited financial statements, and an irrevocable letter of credit from a bank. The list goes on and on.
- Another OEM said they had an exclusive partnership with a certain company. When asked if they would consider another they said "Not at this time."

I find the insinuation that independent providers would be more likely to mishandle customer data very insulting. A national seller of technology products based in Minnesota had a systemic problem with their technicians copying private customer data. And yet, their relationship with major technology manufacturers was not interrupted.

Tech Fixers stands in strong support of this bill. Unless you want the residents of this state to be beholden to the whims of what is essentially a duopoly, I hope you would as well.

Sincerely,

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