

Rex Wilmouth  
Environment Rhode Island  
Testimony of HB-7180 and HB7476  
Position on the bills - Support  
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COMMITTEE - House Corporations

Chairman and committee members

My name is Rex Wilmouth the director of Environment Rhode Island which works for clean air, clean water, clean energy, wildlife and open spaces, and a livable climate.

A native son of Rhode Island, I am here to express my support for HB-7180 and HB-7476 concerning the Right to Repair. Around the country, Environment America groups like Environment Rhode Island have been championing Right to Repair since 2017.

As such, we have heard everything the opposition is saying or will say today. This bill requires access to parts, manuals and repair tools! Without them it's difficult or even impractical to repair a product.

Repairs already happen: We are NOT creating independent repair for the first time ever with this bill. But a set of manufacturers are refusing to cooperate with repair in order to 1) control all the service revenue from repairs, and 2) control product lifecycle.

Electronic waste is a growing global concern. E-waste is highly toxic and expensive to recycle -- about 80% is not even collected for recycling according to the most recent estimates. Making new electronics involves mining "critical minerals" and using a tremendous amount of energy.

Disposable electronics are incompatible with a livable planet. A phone takes about 122 pounds of carbon to make, mostly from mining and smelting the components. Americans replace some 140-150 million phones a year. In fact, a study estimated that if just Rhode Island residents used their phones for one year longer on average it would be like taking 2000 cars off the road in terms of reduced climate pollution.

Given modern technology it is trivial to digitally lock the parts in a device in a way that makes it impossible to repair that device without some kind of tool or code. And we see this in iPhones screens and batteries, sensors in your John Deere tractor, even certain appliance parts. If your spare part has any software on it, and you refuse to sell it, then people seeking a repair will be out of luck.

This bill is based on successful Right to Repair rules for cars, in effect nationwide since 2014. Those rules have not killed dealership repair businesses (which have actually grown), or resulted in some kind of crazy car explosion epidemic. Now five other states have passed some similar laws for other devices. It is a sensible approach that works.

I am not the only one who has heard all these horror stories. The Federal Trade Commission investigated Right to Repair for two years before issuing a landmark report in May 2024, called "Nixing the Fix," which found that all these scary stories about rogue machinery or cybercrime were unsupported by facts. Several months after that report, the commission in a unanimous bipartisan vote decided to step up enforcement against repair restrictions. But as the commissioners stated at the time, they see state progress as key to fixing these issues -- and are also willing to consult with states in setting up Right to Repair systems.

While the harms caused by access to repair materials are based on wild, impractical hypotheticals, there are some real world impacts when it's hard or impossible to fix your stuff outside of the manufacturer's control.

- 1) Repair costs go up.
- 2) Choices go down.
- 3) We replace stuff a lot faster.

It's essential that there is choice in the market.

At the end of the day, that's what this is about. Manufacturers might say we already have choices, but so many of these devices come with all manner of silly or outrageous restrictions on repair to make it impractical to do without access to certain tools, parts or information. For example, you might be able to replace the spare part, but the device needs to be "calibrated" with a tool you cannot buy. You can claim it's about safety or quality, but when only the manufacturer controls repair you should just call it monopoly abuse.

Some more information and articles about the [right to repair our electronics](#).

Thank you for your time on this issue.

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