

Submitted to the House Economic Matters Committee

Testimony Concerning HB 1124

“Consumer Protection – Right to Repair”

March 11, 2020

Position: Support

Members of the Economic Matters Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Bowie Hall. I am an electronics technician with a formal training in electrical engineering technology and 20 years of experience working in the electronics manufacturing industry. I am also a Board Member and Workshop Program Manager of Unallocated Space, a nonprofit maker space in Severn, Maryland.

HB 1124 should be enacted because it will help to remedy original equipment manufacturers (OEM) abuse of copyright protections. OEMs currently hamper innovation by using the copyright system to circumvent the Fair Use Exception for educational purposes. This ultimately results in stymying innovation and hurting the electronics industry in the U.S. by limiting the ability to pass down technical skills and knowledge.

We may know how to use technology, but we are losing any edge we had in understanding it. There are far more technologically literate people in Shenzhen China than here. The number of people there that can assemble a cellphone from the spare parts bought from street vendors is truly impressive. Here many engineers, technicians and students spend a significant amount of time and money becoming literate in technology, just to have OEMs make them functionally illiterate by using the copyright system to restrict their access to knowledge and tools they need to speak the language of technology.

The situation we are in now has put us on a path of making our garbage dumps the richest source of rare earth metals left on the planet. In the future the only place to find rare earth metals will be to mine through the trash of the past. Making the electronics we use today repairable keeps energy usage low and hard to get resources available.

Enacting HB 1124 will help to remedy the current deceptive trade practices that are used by OEMs. OEMs are dishonest and deceitful, leading the public to believe that when they purchase a product, they are in fact the owner of the product. In reality, when you read the fine print that comes with these products it turns out that you don't own the

product in the traditional sense of the word. In effect when any one of us purchases a piece of electronics equipment which we believe we own outright, it turns out we are only leasing the product and are severely limited on what we can do with the product, how we can modify it to best serve our needs and how we can extend the life of the product by being able to repair it.

The groups opposed to this bill are trying to maintain a monopoly on repair. There are plenty of qualified persons who can do these repairs with the tools this bill will provide. The opposition claims that only certified persons can do these repairs safely and securely. Their best practices are not that different from the rest of us. The time it takes to bring experienced qualified persons up to speed is minimal. Security does not have to be compromised to do repairs. Many of the devices that OEMs claim to be unrepairable have been successfully repaired by qualified persons willing to employ tried and true methods with no need of the customers passwords.

For these reasons, I urge you to enact HB 1124. Thank you for your time and attention.

Submitted by:

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