

The History of Right to Repair

As you may already know, I have worked on Right to Repair for over 10 years now. I first began working within our trade association trying to identify the issues we were facing and putting a name on the problem. At first, a colleague actually called it the locked hood syndrome, and the car maker held the keys.

A national grassroots effort took off shortly after and the national Right to Repair movement began with bills filed on Capitol Hill. Congressional Hearings and many meetings later the two opposing camps dug in and the concept of, "We (the aftermarket industry) want what the dealer gets", was born. This was identified as service information, tools, equipment and training. The car companies were quick to point out that the aftermarket parts companies (those that sell parts at the local auto part stores), were behind this massive movement.

As things progressed, we saw a split in the group. The majority of the aftermarket, including small shop owners, part suppliers, repair information vendors and tool makers, supporting the efforts. While at the same time, a slice of small shops were against it. (Still can't figure it). Granted this group of shop owners had a "voluntary agreement" with most of the car companies, it appeared that if you only wanted to work on one or two makes of cars, they felt a small shop could survive and they took that as a viable position.

However, most independent shops like us, work on most makes of vehicles and it was not viable for us. So as far as we were concerned, this independent group looked out for the minority, and not the majority of independents.

Then things took a turn to the state level. We saw bills introduced in several states, including Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York. A concerted effort was made to file legislation in "consumer friendly" states. All together there were meaningful filings in at least 7 to 10 states over the years. As it turns out, Massachusetts and New Jersey is where much of the traction took hold.

In the auto industry, we observe this mantra, as California goes - so goes the country. And conversely, the country goes as the North East goes (mainly New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Massachusetts).

National groups focused their efforts here; bringing big money from parts suppliers and parts makers, to join the efforts from small independent shops. The car companies seized on this, they claimed that this effort was a "parts bill". Their claim included that the parts companies only wanted trade secret information to make knock-off parts in China and steal their business.

In fact, the parts suppliers' main concern was that small shops stay viable so they could sell their wares to us. Essentially they were protecting their business by protecting us. And in today's world, the car companies do more outsourcing overseas that you can imagine, so who was kidding who?

In the last 6 years there have been 6 versions of Right to Repair filed in MA and one Ballot Question, and I am proud to say I have had personal input on 3 of the bills. Even though I was not directly involved in the final "compromise" version, I will say many of the ideas I put forth have come to fruition in this law.

In the current form, House Bill H4362 or "Right to Repair" is a good consumer bill that is over 10 years in the making and I am proud to have been a part of the journey.

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