

Maryland PIRG

HB1429: Consumer Protection - Right to Repair - Motor Vehicles and Farm Equipment Economic Matters Committee

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FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG is a state based, small donor funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. We work to find common ground around common sense solutions that will help ensure a healthier, safer, more secure future.

When something breaks, you fix it. That's common sense. But when the manufacturer withholds what you need to complete repairs -- the diagnostic data, or special computer software, the manuals or technical bulletins, or just spare parts -- that gives the manufacturer control over your repair options. You might be unable to find any viable repair alternative to the manufacturer's authorized dealership, and without competition, they can charge you a lot more.

That's why Maryland PIRG has backed Right to Repair reforms here in Maryland for years, and our national organization, U.S. PIRG has been working to pass and enact reforms which are very similar to HB1429.

This legislation is good for Maryland consumers and good for Maryland farmers.

PIRG has done extensive research into Right to Repair issues on a number of fronts, including for farmers and car owners.

Farm Equipment

We've engaged with hundreds of farmers in our campaign. We hear one thing consistently when discussing Right to Repair: the danger of equipment downtime during key windows.

There can be limited windows to plant or harvest a large amount of land, and if the equipment you need is down, you could miss that window, and with it, your livelihood. There are often bottlenecks for repair during key windows, because when one farmer needs to be out planting, likely all the area farms are in the same boat. All the dealership technicians could be occupied and you could be waiting for weeks for assistance.

PIRG released a report in 2023 which found that equipment downtime -- fueled by lack of repair options -- costs [Maryland farmers \\$21 million per year.](#)

Farm equipment manufacturers have promised for years and years to address this issue, but continue to withhold from farmers the software and technical bulletins they give to dealerships. While manufacturers, specifically Deere, have added features to the software you can lease for

1 year, it isn't the full tool they let dealers have. On their website there is an asterisk when showing this paid tool, which leads to fine print that reminds you not all the features are available.

It's quite frustrating to farmers to pay extra for repair tools only to learn that they can't complete certain repairs, get certain technical information, and still need to call the dealer. It's time we solved this issue.

Cars

Maryland PIRG is supportive of the addition of car repair data to this legislation. Our recent report, [My Car. My Data](#), found that manufacturers control the data our cars generate and transmit back to the manufacturer through the wireless connection in the car.

That control over owner-generated data creates competitive advantages for dealerships at the expense of independent options, and could fundamentally alter repair in three ways:

1. First, manufacturers can use wireless data to proactively identify vehicle issues before they develop, steering upcoming repairs to authorized dealerships.
2. Second, telematic repair data makes diagnosing and fixing issues easier in ways that cannot be replicated with traditional repair tools available to third parties.
3. Lastly, some repairs can be conducted remotely using telematic access, raising concerns about whether independent repairers will be able to conduct certain repairs at all as this technology continues to move forward.

Right now, cars pop up warning messages that prompt the user to go to the dealership -- sometimes they even have a "call the dealer" button as part of that message that pops up on your display screen -- we have pictures of this in our report. No where in that message is any information about what the issue is, and there is nothing that requires the manufacturer to give a local mechanic access to what prompted the alert.

This legislation would give the owner of the car control over who can use that data, so that the independent mechanics can stay on a level playing field with dealerships. We don't let car companies charge us for access to the odometer, why should we allow them to essentially sell us back information about our own car?

Taken together, these two important reforms protect small businesses competition, consumer choice, farmers and the rights of owners in Maryland.

We hope you will advance these important reforms and recommend a favorable report.