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Are Right-to-Repair Laws the Only Way to Fix Tech's Broken Future?



Unblocked Images

/ Tech companies charge \$300 to fix a cracked screen, but new laws are finally breaking their repair monopoly. You're about to save hundreds.

by Rohan Biju

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What if you drop your iPhone 16 Pro and the screen shatters into a spider web of cracks. You walk into the Apple Store, and they quote you \$300 for a repair. Your phone cost \$800 new, so you're stuck paying almost half the original price just to fix a screen. Sound familiar? This exact scenario is why right-to-repair laws are becoming a big deal across the country.

Right-to-repair is pretty simple when you break it down. It's the idea that when you buy something, you should actually own it, including the right to fix it yourself or take it to whoever you want for repairs. Technically, these laws require manufacturers to provide documentation, parts, and tools needed to diagnose and fix products "on fair and reasonable terms." **You shouldn't be forced to pay sky-high fees at the corporate store when your local repair shop could do it for half the price.**

The Problem: When Tech Companies Control Everything /

For years, big tech companies have made it nearly impossible to fix your own devices. Think about it, when was the last time you saw a removable battery in a flagship phone? Companies like Apple, Samsung, and others have been using tricks like proprietary screws, glued-in parts, and software locks that refuse to recognize replacement components.

This isn't an accident. [A 2021 FTC report](#) found that manufacturers routinely use adhesives and software locks to make products "harder to fix," which drives up costs and creates more electronic waste. The result? Perfectly good electronics end up in the trash when they could have been easily repaired.

The scale of corporate resistance has been massive. [A 2023 analysis](#) found nearly \$10.7 trillion worth of companies fighting against repair laws, including tech giants like Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and Meta. Apple alone spent over [\\$9 million a year](#) lobbying against these laws as recently as 2022.

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Companies that contribute to lobbying efforts against Right to Repair are cumulatively worth about \$10.7 trillion

Company	Est. Net Worth (as of April 29)	Evidence of Lobbying
Apple	\$2.26 trillion	2020 CA records for AB1163 2021 CO records for HB1199
Microsoft	\$1.97 trillion	Signed in opposed for HB1212 in WA (2021) 2020 CO records for HB1195
Amazon	\$1.71 trillion	2021 CO records for HB1199 2020 CO records for HB1195
Google	\$1.57 trillion	2020 CA records for AB1163 2021 CO records for HB1199
Facebook	\$863 billion	2018 NY records for AB192
Tesla	\$799 billion	2020 CO records for HB1195 2019 NY records A6589
Johnson & Johnson	\$432 billion	2020 CO records for HB1195
AT&T	\$220 billion	2018 NY records for AB192 2021 CO records for HB1199
Lilly, Inc.	\$178 billion	2018 NY records for AB192
T-Mobile	\$165 billion	2021 CO records for HB1199
Medtronic	\$157 billion	2020 Federal Records for HR7556
Caterpillar	\$123 billion	2018 NY records for AB192
John Deere	\$117 billion	Lobby farm bureau not to support MD bill in 2020 2018 CA records for AB2110
General Electric	\$115 billion	2018 NY records for S618 and AB192 2020 Federal Records for HR7556
Philips	\$55 billion	2020 Federal Records for HR7556
eBay	\$41 billion	2021 CO records for HB1199

Companies have used some dramatic scare tactics too. Apple once warned lawmakers that repair reforms would make Nebraska a "mecca for hackers," while John Deere claimed farmers would illegally mess with emission controls if they could fix their own tractors.

The Momentum is Building /

The good news is that things are changing fast. As of 2024, three states have passed consumer electronics right-to-repair laws covering about 20% of Americans. California's law, which went into effect in July 2024, is especially broad, covering phones, laptops, tablets, TVs, and cameras.

The laws vary by state, but they share the same core idea. New York's 2023 Digital Fair Repair Act forces phone and laptop makers to provide the same repair parts and documentation they give their own stores. California's law covers any device over \$50 sold after 2021 and requires parts and manuals to be available for 3-7 years depending on the device price. Oregon's upcoming law goes even further by outright banning "parts pairing," where software prevents third-party components from working properly.

Even the federal government is paying attention. President Biden called right-to-repair "right" in his 2021 competition executive order, and the White House has hosted roundtables bringing together repair advocates and industry representatives. The FTC has gotten aggressive too, suing companies like John Deere for keeping farmers dependent on their repair networks.

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- [Apple's contract for indie repair shops is so invasive that some refuse to sign it](#)

Companies Are Starting to Cave /

The corporate landscape is shifting dramatically. Google has emerged as a surprising champion of repair rights, releasing a repair-friendly white paper in 2024 and winning the "Right to Repair Advocacy Award" from the Repair Association. Google argues that giving users access to the same parts and manuals as manufacturers is part of making devices last longer.

Even Apple, the poster child for anti-repair practices, has done a complete 180. The company that once fought tooth and nail against repair laws publicly endorsed California's 2024 repair bill and agreed to follow it nationwide. Apple launched its Self Service Repair program in 2022, giving customers access to parts and manuals for the first time.

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But don't expect companies to make it easy just yet. Apple still uses "parts pairing" software that throws up warnings when you use non-genuine parts, even if they work perfectly fine. iFixit actually downgraded the iPhone's repairability score after discovering these software barriers.

Samsung's approach has been messier. The company partnered with iFixit to sell repair parts, but the relationship ended badly in 2024. iFixit accused Samsung of charging ridiculous prices (a battery glued to a screen assembly for \$160 versus a \$50 iPhone battery) and requiring repair shops to hand over customer data. As we, The Verge, put it, Samsung was "forcing repair shops to snitch on you."

Why Should You Care? /

Right-to-repair isn't just about saving money on repairs, though that's a big part of it. It's about three main things: your wallet, the environment, and basic fairness.

- **Your Money:** When repair markets are competitive, prices drop. Local shops can undercut manufacturer prices significantly. The White House noted that opening repair markets "lowers costs" and "increases competition." Instead of being forced to pay whatever Apple or Samsung charges, you get options.
- **The Environment:** Americans throw away 9 million tons of electronic waste every year. Every device you can repair instead of replace is one less gadget in a landfill. The carbon footprint of manufacturing a new phone is large compared to fixing an old one. In the EU, new rules require phones to survive 800 charge cycles and 45 drops, with spare parts available for 7 years.
- **Basic Ownership:** This might be the most important point. "If you can't open it, you can't own it," as Fairphone puts it. It's weird that you can fix your car at any mechanic, but tech companies insist only they can touch your phone. Once you've paid for something, you should control what happens to it.

The Engineering Reality /

To be fair to manufacturers, there are real trade-offs involved in making devices repairable. Waterproofing is the classic example. To get an IP67 rating that lets your phone survive a pool dunking, companies often glue everything together. That keeps water out but makes repairs much harder.

The "parts pairing" issue is more controversial. Companies say software locks ensure quality and security. But as Google points out in its white paper, these locks "should be discouraged" because they create "unfair anti-repair practices." Oregon's new law specifically bans this practice, proving it's possible to maintain security without locking out repairs.

Some companies are showing it's possible to balance repairability with modern features. Framework makes laptops with swappable ports and upgradeable components. Even Apple has started using more screws and fewer adhesives in recent models.



Image: Apple Watch Ultra includes more screws and fewer adhesives to improve repairability

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repairability

What's Next /

The momentum is clearly on the side of repair rights. More states are considering laws, and even formerly hostile companies are getting on board rather than fighting a losing battle. The [FTC has promised to crack down on anti-competitive repair restrictions](#).

Consumer awareness is higher than ever. Tech reviewers now include repairability scores in their reviews, and companies are starting to tout how easy their devices are to fix. Samsung, despite its rocky relationship with iFixit, [still sells parts to comply with state laws](#).

The next few years will be crucial. As more laws take effect and companies adapt, we might finally see the end of the throwaway culture that has dominated tech for the past decade. Your next phone might actually be designed to last more than two years and be fixable when something goes wrong.

So, the next time your screen cracks or your battery dies, remember, you shouldn't have to choose between an expensive repair and a new device. Right-to-repair laws are giving you a third option, and that's something worth supporting.

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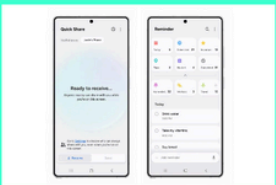
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