

MA Lawmakers Approve 'Right To Repair' Bill

Bob Salsberg, Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Massachusetts lawmakers have given final approval to a compromise bill aimed at settling a dispute over whether automakers should be required to provide independent repair shops and vehicles owners with software needed to diagnose car trouble.

The proposed compromise, which was outlined in a letter to legislative leaders Tuesday, is aimed at avoiding what was expected to be an expensive campaign waged over the so-called "Right to Repair" question that will appear on the November ballot in Massachusetts.

"We believe that this bill ensures an acceptable agreement that will safeguard all of the stakeholders. It will preserve choice for Massachusetts vehicle owners, protect manufacturers' intellectual property, preserve the integrity of the role of the dealer in the repair process, and continue innovation in motor vehicle diagnostics," stated the letter, signed by leaders of the Massachusetts Right to Repair Coalition, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, Global Automakers and the Massachusetts State Automobile Dealers Association.

Rep. Theodore Speliotis, D-Danvers, House chairman of the committee that considered earlier versions of the bill, said the panel voted 15-0 in a telephone poll Tuesday to support the compromise.

Even if Gov. Deval Patrick signs the bill, it would be too late to remove the original question from the November ballot, according to a spokesman for Secretary of State William Galvin. But the organizations said in their letter that they would work together to inform voters about the compromise and urge them to defeat the question.

The fight over the repair legislation has been one of the most heavily-lobbied issues on Beacon Hill over the past several years. It was expected that millions would be spent by groups campaigning for and against the measure.

It sought to have manufacturers that sell cars in Massachusetts provide access to their diagnostic and repair information system through a universal software system that can be accessed by dealers and independent repairs shops.

Supporters said it would provide savings to consumers and the convenience of being able to have their car repaired where they choose, rather than have to go through dealers. They said the compromise brings them closer to that goal.

"It is consumers, car owners, who have been saying that it is their car, they paid for it, they should be able to get it repaired where they want," Art Kinsman, spokesman for the Right to Repair Coalition, said in a statement Tuesday.

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Opponents said individuals and independent repair shops already had the tools and software available to repair most vehicles, and they said the Massachusetts law might force manufacturing design changes that would result in higher sticker prices.

A key element of the compromise would give automakers until 2018 to satisfy a requirement that all new vehicles provide easy access to onboard diagnostic and repair information. It would also allow for new types of non-propriety technologies to be used, which the industry says would allow for future innovation.

"The Alliance has worked for many months to ensure that every car owner and repairer can continue to access the information they need while protecting our intellectual property and ability to innovate, moving the 'connected car' of the future, as well as safety and security of our vehicles," said Daniel Gage, an alliance spokesman.

Gage added that the compromise would avoid an "unproductive ballot fight."

Speliotis said the bill could serve as a national model for similar repair legislation.

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