

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment
on Senate Bill 1596**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon’s environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members—

On behalf of the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC), a nonpartisan, environmental nonprofit that works at the nexus of human health and the environment, I would like to express my support for SB 1596 – and discuss the environmental health reasons why. SB 1596 would require manufacturers of household electronics to make the diagnostic tools, replacement parts and tools available to repair electronic equipment without having to become an authorized repair provider.

SB 542 reduces hazardous electronic waste for the environment by allowing us to “reduce, reuse, then recycle.” Currently, some manufacturers of everyday household items like vacuums, toasters, and smart phones use their power in the marketplace to make things harder to repair, and thereby force consumers to buy new things, rather than fixing or reusing their things. These companies design products without the parts necessary to fix a component, such as vacuum cleaners, or they make repairs proprietary so that only the manufacturing company can do the repairs—all so they can make a profit.

Electronic waste or e-waste is difficult to recycle, toxic to human health and the environment, and contains non-renewable rare earth minerals that are being mined at an unsustainable rate. For example, it is estimated that Americans purchase 161 million new smart phones a year (an iPhone 6 requires 295 lbs of raw minerals).^{1,2} As such, e-waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world.³ Such waste eventually ends up in our landfills and leaches into our soil and waterways. Giving Oregonians the access to be able to repair parts and electronics that can be easily fixed is critical to waste prevention, reducing the demand for natural resources, and furthering equity amongst lower and moderate-income families.

¹ <https://uspirg.org/feature/usp/fix>.

² <https://www.vice.com/en/article/433wyq/everything-thats-inside-your-iphone>.

³ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/02/how-do-we-tackle-the-fastest-growing-waste-stream-on-the-planet/>.

Repairing is good for the local economy and jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic showed us that not everyone can afford to purchase new laptops or phones on a whim. Estimates in May 2021 show that students in Oregon were short 75,000 laptops for distance learning. Repairing and refurbishing things rather than requiring new purchases can increase inventories, create local economic opportunity requiring the purchase of new items can create local economic opportunity, support local business, and keep parts and electronics more affordable for everyone.

Reducing electronic waste in our landfills can also reduce hazardous chemical exposures to our environmental and waste management workers.

Essential workers, including hazardous waste workers are potentially exposed to organohalogen flame retardants, bromine, and heavy metals, from broken or decomposing electronic waste and electronics that have been sent to the landfill. Exposure to flame retardants have been shown to cause neurological damage, hormone disruption, and cancer.⁴ They bioaccumulate in humans, causing long-term chronic health problems.⁵

Furthermore, as e-waste breaks down in landfills, it can leach heavy metals into the soil and groundwater and contaminated crops, and into our water bodies and contaminate the fish.⁶ And when e-waste is incinerated at a landfill, it can release these same chemicals into the air into the surrounding communities- usually low income ones.

SB 1596 is the result of advocates collaboration with electronic manufacturers. Since the last session, SB 1596 has gone through several changes addressing the concerns of manufacturers- such as removing the private right of action in lieu of state attorney general enforcement and adding a lookback period for covered devices.⁷ As such, partners such as Google are supporting the bill. The bill would not require manufacturers to produce any new documentation, tools, or parts that they don't already have and are already being used for repair and expands protections for manufacturer copyrights, patents, and intellectual property.

SB 1596 is a commonsense solution to our overconsumption of electronics. We urge this committee to support this bill.

Sincerely,

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⁴ <https://www.saferstates.org/toxic-chemicals/toxic-flame-retardants/>.

⁵ <https://www.saferstates.org/toxic-chemicals/toxic-flame-retardants/>.

⁶ <https://gerecycle.com/3-scary-effects-of-e-waste-on-the-environment-and-human-health/>.

⁷ For smart phones, the law will only apply for products first manufactured after July 1, 2021. For all other products like computers and appliances, the law will apply to those first manufactured after July 1, 2015.