

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Committee, my name is John Vallely. I am the President of North McLean AutoCare Center, a family business employing approximately 10 people, with 3 service bays and gasoline islands. We are located in Elgin, Illinois and were founded in 1970.

I currently serve as the Chairman of the School District U-46 Automotive Advisory, and the Elgin Community College Automotive Advisory Committees. I am also a part-time Automotive Instructor at the College.

I have served on the NAPA National AutoCare Advisory Council for two years. Participation requires input on issues such as technician and management training requirements and recommendations, discussion of industry trends and issues particular to the automotive industry, AutoCare membership standards, imaging and promotions, business aids and programs which promote automotive professionalism. These issues and other programs allow us, the independent repair shops, to be competitive in today's market environment. Currently I serve as a member of the local NAPA Chicago AutoCare Advertising Committee.

My independent repair facility is only one of the over 10,000 nationally recognized network of quality NAPA AutoCare Centers. Being a NAPA AutoCare Center has allowed me to remain independent and maintain a competitive edge. My employees and their families are proud of our reputation of being a respected and trusted repair facility within our community.

NAPA and other aftermarket trainers provide technical training in specific automotive systems, introducing the latest in diagnostic and repair techniques for both the domestic and import vehicles. Their extensive management training teaches the shop owners how to manage cash flow, set goals for the business, manage employees and best serve the community through technician training.

NAPA, as well as other aftermarket companies, requires highly trained technicians who must be certified through the Automotive Service Excellence or ASE program. This is a written requirement in the "Code of Ethics" that each AutoCare dealer agreed to prior to being accepted as a NAPA AutoCare Center. These skilled technicians have worked on a large range of models and systems and should not be deprived from continuing on that path.

My son, Christopher, is currently enrolled in the automotive training program at Elgin Community College. He has worked at the shop for three years and intends to take over the business as his chosen career. Frankly, I am gravely concerned with the future and longevity of the independent automotive maintenance and repair business if the current trends are not curtailed. Many of my colleagues have voiced similar concerns. Today's automobiles are increasingly more sophisticated due to advancements in computer controlled technology that can be found in most major systems of the automobile today. Information on service procedures as well as accessibility to diagnostic codes and procedures is crucial to their proper maintenance and repair.

Currently much of the necessary repair and diagnostic information is difficult, if not impossible to attain. In order to access the codes, many of the vehicles require specific test equipment that is cost prohibitive for most independent repair shops to purchase and keep updated. Recently my shop had to send a customer to the Jeep dealership to program his replacement ignition keys and remote transmitters, the procedure required the Chrysler DRBIII scan tool to perform the procedure. For our BMW customers, we purchased a special \$400.00 device simply to reset the service reminder light after a routine engine oil and filter change. If I was unable to reset the reminder light, my customer would have gone back to BMW for the service. I felt that if I had to explain how I was unable to reset the light, my customer would question my ability to properly service his vehicle.

My colleagues, particularly the ones that specialize in European cars, stated to me recently that many of the European manufacturers are not releasing repair codes or repair information on their late model computerized control systems. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to service many vehicle models due to a lack of the necessary information.

Having the ability to economically access, accurately diagnose, and properly repair the automotive computer controlled systems is crucial to any automotive repair shop's future whether it be an OE dealership or an independent repair facility. Without the access to diagnostic procedures from the manufacturers, we, the aftermarket, would be prohibited from repairing many current and future automobiles and light trucks. If this were allowed to happen, the number of vehicles that we would be able to repair would diminish, and eventually force us out of business. This would reduce the available number of bays in our community, leave skilled employees without jobs and, eventually, unfairly cause the automobile owners only one choice for repair due to the lack of competition.

A black out of information and affordable diagnostic equipment would blatantly create a monopoly for the OE dealerships. Results may create safety concerns and clean air problems as well. Motorists who are driving vehicles that are in immediate need of a repair on safety or emissions related systems such as brakes, air bags, steering, and engine performance issues but live in towns where car dealerships are not present, or motorists on vacation with their families in areas without car dealerships, could compromise their safety and that of others by attempting to drive an unsafe vehicle.

Additionally, if the independent repair industry were locked out of and denied access to codes and repair information on computer controlled systems; those motorists would be left without choice and be forced to return to the OE dealership. Considering the number of vehicles in service today with new cars and light trucks being delivered daily, the OE dealerships would be overloaded and unable to perform service in a reasonable, cost efficient or timely manner. The repair facility choice must remain with the vehicle owner and requires a variety of competitive automotive service centers to reserve that right. Competition always benefits the consumer. In order to accomplish this, the information must

be available.

With the European manufacturers already denying the aftermarket access to information to properly repair their vehicles, what is to stop other manufacturers from following their lead? Heck, manufacturers such as Volkswagen have already stated that they will not share their information. There will be no uniformity for motorists to place their trust. As the American workers are forced from their automotive aftermarket related jobs, the economic domino effect will cause the American economy to suffer instead. Unemployed people simply do not spend money that they do not have. But, by then it will be too late.

Legislation and not negotiation is the appropriate way to stop the potential strong-armed collapse of the automotive aftermarket that is so vital to America's transportation and resolve the "fair repair" problem.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this small business consumer problem. I would be pleased to answer any questions.