

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1399

AS OF APRIL 2, 1991

Brief Description: Expanding electronic equipment warranties.

SPONSORS: House Committee on Commerce & Labor (originally sponsored by Representatives Beck, Cantwell, Heavey, Sheldon, Forner, R. King, Casada, Roland, Moyer, Betrozoff and G. Fisher).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Staff: Jonathan Seib (786-7427)

Hearing Dates: April 4, 1991

BACKGROUND:

As a matter of practice, electronic equipment manufacturers warrant their equipment against certain defects. Often the warranties are honored by retailers as part of their contractual obligation or by independent maintenance and service facilities. Manufacturers do not always supply the necessary parts promptly or at a price that keeps the warranty service within the retailer's cost of doing business. In some cases, service costs on equipment covered by a warranty are transferred to consumers seeking service without a warranty.

SUMMARY:

Certain criteria are established for warranties on home electronic equipment and home appliances. Home electronic equipment includes television monitors, radios, audio or video recorders, and accessories normally used or sold for personal, family, or household purposes. Home appliance includes refrigerators, freezers, ranges, and other large home appliances.

Every warranty must state that the warranty period will be extended for the number of days that the product has been in the repair facility for warranty repairs. The warranty period will also be extended: (1) if a defect exists within the warranty period and the buyer takes the product to a repair facility for servicing, the warranty period shall not expire until after the defect has been fixed; or (2) if the repairs fail within 10 days after they have been completed. If after four attempts the defect has not been fixed, the buyer may return the product for replacement or refund, subject to a reasonable charge for use.

Every work order or repair invoice for warranty repairs or service must include a standard statement explaining warranty rights provided by Washington law.

If a manufacturer makes an express warranty, the manufacturer must maintain sufficient service and repair facilities in the area to carry out the terms of the warranty. This provision does not apply to products sold by mail order retailers. To comply with this requirement, a manufacturer may enter into warranty service contracts with independent service and repair facilities. Warranty service contracts may include a fixed schedule of rates to be charged for warranty service. However, the rates fixed by these contracts must include actual and reasonable cost of service and repair, plus a 20 percent mark-up on costs for parts and shipping, and a reasonable profit. Manufacturers may consider extra services they provide to the service dealer when establishing these fixed rates.

Manufacturers contracting with independent service and repair facilities must make service literature and replacement parts available within 30 days of a request from a service and repair facility. A manufacturer making express warranties is liable to an authorized independent service center that performs services or incurs obligations under the express warranties that accompany the manufacturer's consumer goods. There is a rebuttable presumption that the reasonable cost of service or repair is the amount charged by the independent service people for like services on nonwarranty services. However, a manufacturer's liability may be offset by a good faith discount. Any waiver of liability of a manufacturer is void and unenforceable.

A dispute arising from cancellation of a warranty service center contract that cannot be resolved by the parties to the contract must be presented to the American Arbitration Association or a dispute resolution center for mediation.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect July 1, 1991.