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A PROPOSED ACT OF CONGRESS

The Heavy-Duty Repair Transparency & Fairness Act

Federal legislation to end predatory repair pricing, dealer-locked diagnostics, and predatory towing that are bankrupting America's small trucking carriers — and to protect the supply chain they hold up.

HD - RTFA

PROPOSED FEDERAL LEGISLATION 2026

AUTHOR & SPONSOR	ISSUING BODY	VERSION	STATUS
Michael Thomas, Founder	Logistical Forwarding Solutions	2.0 / 2026 Revision	For Introduction

A BILL

The Heavy-Duty Repair Transparency and Fairness Act (HD-RTFA)

To protect America's trucking and logistics infrastructure by establishing transparency, oversight, fair-repair access, and enforceable ethical standards in heavy-duty commercial vehicle repair, parts, diagnostics, and towing.

AUTHOR
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VERSION
2.0 (2026 Revision)

DOCTRINE
Carrier-First

STATUS
Proposed Federal Legislation

Whereas trucking moves roughly 72.7% of America's freight tonnage and is the only freight mode reaching most rural and final-mile communities; and whereas that backbone rests not on large corporate fleets but on small independent carriers — be it enacted by the Congress of the United States of America.

§ 1 Short Title

This Act may be cited as the "Heavy-Duty Repair Transparency and Fairness Act" or the "HD-RTFA."

§ 2 Congressional Findings

Congress finds the following:

2.1 The small carrier is the backbone — and the most exposed link.

Small carriers carry the nation's freight but hold almost no pricing power against the repair, parts, diagnostic, and towing complex that services them. Per FMCSA data, roughly 91.5% of all registered carriers operate ten or fewer power units, about 96% operate fewer than twenty trucks, and nearly half are single-truck owner-operators. Large carriers of one hundred or more trucks represent less than one percent of registered entities, yet exert disproportionate influence over rate-setting, lobbying, and supplier terms. When a repair or towing bill lands, the small carrier absorbs it alone, with no reserve and no leverage.

2.2 The repair-and-parts profit model is structurally aligned against carrier uptime.

Major truck manufacturers have shifted the bulk of their profit from selling trucks to servicing them — a "razor-and-blades" model in which the durable margin is extracted over the life of the vehicle. This is disclosed corporate strategy, not speculation. In publicly filed financials, the largest U.S. pure-play truck maker reported a truck-segment gross margin near 13.9% against an aftermarket-parts gross margin near 30% — parts margin running about 2.2× truck margin. By the first quarter of 2026, that manufacturer's parts division out-earned its entire truck division on a pretax basis by more than two to one. Parts and financial services now generate roughly 71% of that company's total profit, up from about 43% in 2014. The largest U.S. truck dealer group reported a service-and-parts absorption ratio of 130.8% — parts-and-service gross profit more than covered the dealer's entire overhead before a single truck was sold.

DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE — VERIFIED 2023–2026 DATA

Share of U.S. freight tonnage moved by trucking	**72.7%**
Registered carriers operating ten or fewer trucks	**91.5%**
Leading OEM: aftermarket-parts vs. new-truck gross margin	**~30% vs. 13.9%**
Parts + financial services share of that OEM's total profit	**~71%**
Largest U.S. dealer group service-and-parts absorption ratio	**130.8%**
Average predatory tow invoice vs. standard tow (ATRI, 350 carriers)	**$18,154 vs. $8,926**
Emissions "one-box" replacement — parts only	**$9,000–$13,400**
In-frame engine overhaul / full engine replacement	**$15K–$25K / ~$35K**
Strategic cargo-theft growth, 2022–2024	**~1,475%**

Sources: FMCSA registration data; PACCAR SEC filings & earnings (FY2024–Q1 2026); Rush Enterprises 8-K; ATRI, Causes and Countermeasures of Predatory Towing (2023); SBA Office of Advocacy (2026); Verisk CargoNet. Figures are verified ranges; individual invoices cited by class.

2.3 Repair and towing costs are the proximate cause of small-carrier failure.

For a small carrier running a three-to-six-year-old used truck through a dealer network, the relevant risk is not the industry-average cost per mile — it is the discrete, five-figure failure event that arrives with no cash behind it. A single such event, combined with weeks of lost revenue while the truck sits, routinely converts a profitable month into a net loss capable of ending a one-truck business that nets $50,000–$65,000 in a year.

2.4 Predatory towing is a documented, quantified emergency.

Heavy-duty towing commonly runs $4–$15 per mile plus a $250–$600 hook-up charge, with recovery and rotator work billed hourly. A 2023 ATRI study of 350 carriers found the average non-predatory tow invoice was $8,925.90 while the average predatory invoice was $18,154.52; that 29.8% of crash-related invoices contained excessive or unwarranted charges; that 82.7% of carriers reported excessive rates; and that among tows billed over $30,000, roughly two-thirds were predatory. Because a disabled vehicle and its cargo are physically held by the tow operator, the carrier has little practical ability to refuse the charge — an effective seizure of commercial equipment.

2.5 Dealer-locked diagnostics convert routine faults into forced dealer visits.

Since the EPA 2010 standard, every heavy diesel carries DPF, SCR, and DEF systems whose faults can trigger sudden “derates” that cut a truck’s speed and power within hours. Many fault codes cannot be practically cleared without dealer-controlled software and tooling, forcing an otherwise capable operator or independent mechanic into the dealer bay. The federal government has acknowledged the burden: in 2025 the EPA softened sudden derates, and in 2026 permitted alternative monitoring in place of failure-prone sensors — changes the agency itself framed as relieving small operators of substantial lost productivity.

2.6 Fraud is a low-frequency, high-severity killer with effectively no recourse.

Strategic cargo theft and the chameleon-carrier and double-brokering ecosystem are federally documented and growing — strategic theft rose roughly 1,475% between 2022 and 2024, with hundreds of millions in reported 2025 losses. A small carrier defrauded through a load board, even one that appeared verified, almost never recovers the loss. This Act treats repair, towing, and load-board fraud as related predatory pressures on the same vulnerable operator.

2.7 The cost is passed to the public.

Commercial repair fraud, inflated service costs, and predatory towing raise the cost of moving freight — and that cost flows directly into the price of food, fuel, medicine, and every consumer good. Protecting the small carrier is protecting the supply chain and the household budget alike.

§ 3 Definitions

Covered repair entity

Any repair shop, service center, dealer-affiliated service location, mobile-repair operator, or towing and recovery operator that services heavy-duty commercial motor vehicles.

Heavy-duty commercial vehicle

A commercial motor vehicle as defined by the FMCSA operating in interstate or intrastate commerce, including Class 7 and Class 8 tractors, trailers, and associated equipment.

Benchmark pricing

The federally administered, regionally adjusted reference pricing for repair labor, parts, and towing services established under this Act.

Predatory practice

Any conduct defined in Section 12, including inflated pricing, fabricated diagnostics, unauthorized work, excessive storage fees, mandatory bundling, and collusion between towing and repair providers.

Diagnostic and repair information

The software, tools, fault-code access, calibrations, wiring diagrams, and technical documentation necessary to diagnose, service, and complete repairs to a heavy-duty commercial vehicle.

Right to repair

The right of a vehicle owner, or an independent repair provider of the owner's choosing, to access diagnostic and repair information on fair and non-discriminatory terms.

§ 4 National Repair Pricing Transparency & Standardization

Create a federally administered, publicly accessible database establishing benchmark pricing for heavy-duty commercial vehicle repairs and part replacements, adjusted regionally for labor rates, parts availability, and freight density.

Require all participating covered repair entities to disclose itemized repair estimates before work begins — including labor hours, hourly rates, parts costs, parts sourcing origin, and markups. Pricing must fall within federal guidelines unless justified through a documented exemption review.

Require written, itemized authorization from the vehicle owner or authorized agent before any billable work commences, and prohibit charging for work or parts not disclosed and authorized in advance.

Mandate an annual FMCSA audit process to verify invoice accuracy, confirm compliance, and monitor systemic violations. Empower the FMCSA to issue warnings, fines, or temporary removal from federal procurement eligibility for entities repeatedly out of compliance.

§ 5 Right to Repair & Diagnostic Access

Establish a federal right to repair for heavy-duty commercial vehicles. Require manufacturers and dealers to make diagnostic and repair information — including fault-code access, the ability to clear non-safety-critical codes, calibrations, and necessary tooling — available to vehicle owners and independent repair providers on fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory terms and pricing.

Prohibit the use of software locks, proprietary tooling, or telematics restrictions for the purpose of steering owners into dealer-only service where an independent provider can perform the repair safely and to specification.

Require that emissions-system fault handling permit safe, temporary continued operation to the nearest qualified repair facility, consistent with applicable EPA guidance, rather than immediate immobilizing derates that strand a vehicle and its cargo. Preserve all applicable safety, warranty, and emissions-compliance requirements; nothing in this Section authorizes tampering with emissions controls or safety systems.

§ 6 Commercial Repair Oversight Task Force

Establish a dedicated task force within the U.S. Department of Transportation to identify and address systemic abuse in the commercial vehicle repair sector, including regulatory officials, logistics policy experts, industry stakeholders, independent repair representatives, and public members.

Investigate excessive pricing, repeated overbilling, fraudulent diagnostics, and upcharges that exceed national benchmarks. Coordinate with the FMCSA and IRS to analyze invoicing patterns and financial data to identify predatory behavior and inflated cost structures.

Empower the DOT to conduct unannounced field audits of covered repair entities — including service-documentation review, technician-labor validation, and cross-comparison of invoices against benchmark pricing — and develop enforcement protocols including warnings, fines, compliance mandates, and civil referral. Produce semiannual public oversight reports identifying trends, enforcement actions, and regional hotspots.

§ 7 Predatory Towing & Recovery Reform

Extend federal oversight to the commercial towing and recovery industry, repeatedly cited for extreme price inflation, unauthorized towing, and the effective seizure of commercial vehicles.

Implement a towing rate audit program establishing acceptable thresholds for hook fees, per-mile charges, hourly recovery and rotator rates, storage rates, and administrative costs, adjusted regionally. Require operators servicing heavy-duty vehicles to submit price logs and service authorizations for audit.

- Require, before non-consensual heavy-duty tows where practicable, disclosure of rates and an itemized estimate; and require prompt written itemization for all charges following any tow.
- Prohibit holding a commercial vehicle or its cargo hostage to compel payment of disputed or unauthorized charges, and establish an expedited release-and-dispute mechanism so a carrier can recover equipment and cargo while contesting charges.
- Investigate and penalize the use of towing to coerce inflated repairs, extended storage, or upsells — including collusion between tow operators and repair shops.

§ 8 Emissions-System Repair Fairness

Direct the DOT, in coordination with the EPA, to address the disproportionate repair burden that post-2010 emissions systems (DPF, DOC, SCR, DEF) place on small carriers.

Require that diagnostic access for emissions faults be available to independent repair providers under Section 5, and that fault handling favor safe continued operation to a repair facility over immediate immobilization. Direct a review of high-failure emissions components and dealer-only repair pathways, and require reporting on the availability and pricing of remanufactured and independently supplied emissions parts. Encourage, through Section 11, the use of certified remanufactured components that reduce recurring emissions-repair cost without compromising compliance.

§ 9 Verified Repair Network (VRN)

Launch a national platform identifying ethical, transparent, fair-repair-compliant heavy-duty repair facilities. Offer certification, searchable public listings, and promotional incentives for shops and tow operators that meet federal transparency and fair-repair standards. Require annual re-certification and published customer-satisfaction benchmarks, and integrate the Repair Compliance Score established in Section 12.

§ 10 Whistleblower Protections & Reporting

Launch a secure, encrypted FMCSA-hosted Repair Oversight Portal to receive confidential complaints and supporting documentation — invoices, service records, photos, and testimony — permitting anonymous submissions.

Provide robust federal protection from retaliation — including termination, harassment, blacklisting, or civil threats — for drivers, owner-operators, carriers, and shop and tow employees who report inflated pricing, fraudulent diagnostics, parts mislabeling, forced repairs, diagnostic lockouts, or towing abuse. Designate a specialized FMCSA enforcement and intake team, coordinate with the Departments of Labor and Justice for extended protections, run a nationwide awareness campaign, and publish an annual Whistleblower Integrity Report.

§ 11 Incentives for Independent, Ethical Shops

Provide tax credits and grant access to small and independent repair businesses and tow operators that maintain VRN compliance, with additional incentives for shops that offer certified remanufactured components, transparent diagnostic access, and published flat-rate labor. Include optional apprenticeship and job-training tax relief for shops participating in workforce development, helping address the diesel-technician shortage that drives repair costs upward.

§ 12 Penalties for Predatory Practices

Authorize escalating civil penalties for any covered repair entity or towing operator that systematically exceeds federally established markup thresholds without justification, scaled to frequency and severity, with repeat offenders subject to suspension from federally subsidized programs and procurement directories. Require public disclosure of confirmed violations via an FMCSA-maintained database. For purposes of this Act, “predatory practices” include:

- Inflating parts or labor charges beyond federally accepted ranges.
- Fabricating or exaggerating diagnostic results to upsell services.
- Charging for unauthorized work or parts not delivered.
- Withholding diagnostic access or fault-code clearing to force dealer-only service where an independent repair is feasible.
- Excessive storage fees following towing, without appropriate notice.
- Bundling unrelated or non-urgent repairs into mandatory service quotes.
- Collusion between towing companies and repair shops to hold equipment until excessive bills are paid.
- Holding a commercial vehicle or its cargo to compel payment of disputed charges.

Establish a national Repair Compliance Score, modeled after CSA safety ratings, publicly visible and updated from audits, complaints, and regulatory findings. Allow temporary or permanent delisting from the Verified Repair Network and national procurement directories for continuous violation, and enable coordination with state attorneys general and consumer-protection agencies for civil or criminal enforcement in egregious cases.

§ 13 Consumer & Economic Impact Review; AI-Driven Monitoring

Commission an annual, data-driven study, jointly conducted by the Department of Commerce and the FMCSA, assessing the national economic impact of repair fraud, inflated service costs, dealer-diagnostic lockouts, and towing-related price manipulation on the freight industry, small-business solvency, consumer pricing, and supply-chain performance.

Employ artificial intelligence and machine-learning analytics across submitted invoices, audit records, whistleblower reports, pricing deviations, and regional benchmarks to detect anomalies, forecast abuse hotspots, and flag under-regulated zones for enforcement review. Integrate AI-driven analytics into the VRN database to enhance scoring and proactively issue enforcement alerts. Deliver findings in an annual "State of Repair Fairness" report to Congress with visualized data, regional insights, economic projections, and policy recommendations.

§ 14 Coordination, Rulemaking, Funding & Effective Date

Direct the DOT and FMCSA to issue implementing regulations within eighteen months of enactment, with public notice and comment. Authorize appropriations necessary to establish the benchmark-pricing database, the Repair Oversight Portal, the Verified Repair Network, the oversight task force, and the AI monitoring program, and permit funding recovery through penalties collected under Section 12.

Require coordination among the FMCSA, DOT, EPA, IRS, and the Departments of Labor, Justice, and Commerce to implement this Act without duplicative burden on compliant small businesses. This Act takes effect upon enactment, with operative compliance obligations phased in as set by rulemaking.

Why This Bill Matters

The HD-RTFA is not merely a repair policy — it is a national safeguard for the logistics backbone of the United States. Commercial repair fraud, diagnostic lockouts, and predatory towing are dismantling small fleets and bankrupting owner-operators at the exact moment the nation needs its supply chain at full strength.

We cannot wait for a market engineered to extract, nor rely on voluntary ethics in a system that rewards exploitation. Every month of delay sidelines more truckers, delays more cargo, and raises more household costs. This Act delivers transparency, fair-repair rights, enforcement, AI-driven accountability, and national economic monitoring — the most advanced logistics-protection framework introduced in a generation. Repair transparency and the right to repair are not optional; they are essential to national infrastructure security, supply-chain affordability, and public economic trust.

? Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Heavy-Duty Repair Transparency and Fairness Act?

A proposed federal bill establishing transparent repair pricing, a right to repair for heavy-duty commercial vehicles, oversight of predatory towing, whistleblower protections, and penalties for predatory practices — designed to protect America’s small trucking carriers and the supply chain they hold up.

Who does the HD-RTFA protect?

Small independent motor carriers, owner-operators, and fleet operators — the roughly 96% of registered carriers running fewer than twenty trucks — as well as consumers, who ultimately pay for inflated freight costs through higher prices.

What does “right to repair” mean for truck owners?

Truck owners and the independent mechanics they choose can access the diagnostic tools, fault-code clearing, and technical information needed to service their own vehicles on fair terms — instead of being forced into dealer-only service by software locks — while all emissions and safety compliance requirements remain in place.

How does the bill address predatory towing?

It creates a towing rate audit program with benchmark thresholds for hook fees, mileage, recovery, and storage charges; requires itemized authorization and disclosure; prohibits holding a vehicle or cargo hostage over disputed charges; and imposes escalating penalties on operators who exceed benchmarks without cause.

— END OF PROPOSED ACT —