



# 2025

## **High Costs, Hard Hits**

The Consumer Struggle with  
Rising Collision Repair Prices

**abpa**

Automotive Body Parts Association

# High Costs, Hard Hits:

The Consumer Struggle with  
Rising Collision Repair Prices

presented by



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>QUANTITATIVE SURVEY</i>	5
<i>QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS</i>	6
<i>LIMITATIONS</i>	7
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>RISING REPAIR COSTS AND STICKER SHOCK</i>	7
CONSUMERS IN FOCUS: SHERRY T.	9
<i>THE UNEVEN FINANCIAL BURDEN OF RISING REPAIR COSTS</i>	10
CONSUMERS IN FOCUS: DEJA W.	12
<i>THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF RISING COLLISION REPAIR COSTS</i>	13
CONSUMERS IN FOCUS: JOSIE S.	14
<i>PARTS AVAILABILITY AND THE IMPACT OF REPAIR DELAYS</i>	15
<i>REPAIR COSTS, INSURANCE, AND TOTAL LOSSES</i>	16
<i>LIMITS OF PUBLIC TRANSIT</i>	17
<i>COMPETITION, THE AFTERMARKET, AND THE RIGHT TO REPAIR</i>	17
<b>DISCUSSION &amp; CONCLUSION</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>GROWING PART COMPLEXITY</i>	19
<i>THE ABPA RECOMMENDS</i>	20
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>20</b>



# A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Members, Stakeholders, and Advocates,

The Automotive Body Parts Association (ABPA) is proud to present "High Costs, Hard Hits: The Consumer Struggle with Rising Auto Repair Prices," which we believe is a vital step toward addressing the challenges facing the collision repair industry and the consumers we serve. Rising repair costs, driven by limited competition and restricted access to affordable replacement parts, are impacting drivers and independent repair shops nationwide. These issues demand action.

This research was undertaken to uncover the systemic barriers that have made repairs increasingly unaffordable for consumers while constraining the aftermarket's ability to compete and innovate. Through data and personal stories, the report highlights the need for legislative solutions and industry reforms to restore fairness and balance to the market.

The findings reinforce the importance of ABPA's ongoing advocacy efforts. We are committed to ensuring access to high-quality, affordable replacement parts and creating a competitive marketplace that benefits drivers and businesses alike. This report is not just a collection of facts—it is a call to action for meaningful change.

Thank you for your support as we continue this vital work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward Salamy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "S" at the end.

Edward Salamy  
Executive Director  
Automotive Body Parts Association (ABPA)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The cost of collision repairs is climbing rapidly, placing an immense financial strain on American drivers—far beyond what can be explained by normal inflation. This report, prepared for the Automotive Body Parts Association (ABPA), examines the impact of these soaring expenses on consumers. Inspired by recent research linking car manufacturers' monopolistic practices to inflated part prices and limited access to affordable alternatives, we illustrate how this situation leaves drivers with few repair options and forces them into difficult (sometimes even life-altering) financial situations.

Our research combines a large-scale survey of American drivers with in-depth interviews to capture the complex effects these rising costs have on consumers' lives. Our data paints a stark picture:

**Drivers are being financially squeezed, depleting savings, taking on debt, or even delaying critical repairs just to stay afloat.**

The hardest-hit are lower-income households, who must make impossible choices like whether to repair their only reliable source of transportation or cover other essential expenses. Repair delays—driven by high part costs and limited availability—compound the situation, disrupting people's daily lives and causing them to struggle to get to work and essential medical appointments.

We heard from drivers who described their shock and helplessness when faced with sky-high repair bills and inflated insurance premiums—another byproduct of increased repair costs. Independent repair shops, which

have often been a source of relief, are feeling the squeeze as well, and are unable to compete because they cannot get the parts or data needed to fix newer vehicles. This lack of competition is a serious problem, and the frustration among consumers is palpable. Many feel trapped in a system that prioritizes profit over fairness, and it's taking a real financial and emotional toll. These results echo the Federal Trade Commission's 2021 "Nixing the Fix" report, which highlighted similar issues, showing that restricted access to parts and data isn't just inconvenient—it's harmful to millions of Americans.

Legislative solutions, like the REPAIR Act and the SMART Act, could help level the playing field by ensuring that independent repair shops can access the tools and parts they need to compete. These bills are progressing through Congress and our findings make a strong case for their swift enactment. Drivers are desperate for more affordable repair options and, when aware of them, overwhelmingly support these bills.

***The bottom line is clear: it's time for change.***

Supporting the right-to-repair movement and passing legislation promoting competition will lower repair costs, improve consumer choice, and ease the financial burden for families nationwide. The ABPA's call to action is simple—let's enact this legislation once and for all and put an end to the monopolistic practices that make car ownership increasingly unaffordable and life increasingly harder for millions of American drivers.

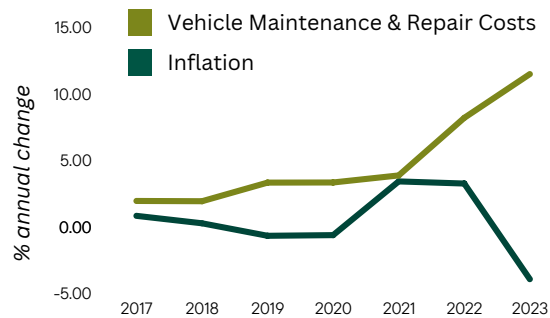
## INTRODUCTION

Collision repair costs have been on a steady upward trajectory in recent years, creating financial burdens for American drivers that cannot be accounted for by inflation alone (Fig 1). While several factors contribute to the growing expenses, one critical driver is the suppression of the aftermarket for affordable, alternative collision parts. Without the checks and balances of a competitive market, dealerships can artificially inflate part prices far beyond the MSRP, causing undue financial pressure on consumers forced to pay premium prices for repairs in insular dealership networks. For drivers, **skyrocketing out-of-pocket costs and growing repair delays lead to significant disruptions in their daily lives,** particularly in regions where personal vehicles are essential for commuting and accessing crucial services.

Despite efforts from industry experts and stakeholders to advocate for change, progress has been limited. Drivers are left frustrated and confused, blaming insurance companies and repair shops because they cannot access the whole picture. In reality, the situation is far more complex. Recent reports have illustrated how vehicle manufacturers have artificially inflated collision repair part prices to levels that cannot be justified by inflation or pandemic-related supply chain disruptions alone (O'Neal, 2023; Fig. 1). Meanwhile, they continue to avoid accountability. Meaningful policy action has yet to take hold even in light of reports like the 2021 Federal Trade Commission (FTC) "Nixing the Fix: An FTC Report to Congress on Repair Restrictions." **The result is a constricted marketplace that offers consumers little choice, effectively funneling them toward dealerships for repairs.** Meanwhile, independent repair shops struggle to compete, cut off from affordable aftermarket parts and critical diagnostic data.

The lack of empirical data demonstrating the real-life struggles of drivers seeking collision repairs may contribute to policy inaction. The Automotive Body Parts Association (ABPA) aims to fill this gap. Through in-depth surveys and personal interviews, we strive to provide a comprehensive look at the challenges drivers face in response to rising collision repair costs and delays. The result is a robust, rigorous case for fairer practices and greater access to affordable parts.

Figure 1. **Percent Annual Change in the Rate of Inflation and Vehicle Maintenance & Repair** (Consumer Price Index) from 2017 to 2023.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the financial and emotional impact of rising collision repair costs on United States drivers. Our inquiry focuses specifically on how these costs affect individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. We contextualize our findings within industry-wide, systemic barriers like restricted access to alternative parts and inflated vehicle manufacturer part prices.

### QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

A structured survey was designed to capture a broad range of experiences related to recent vehicle collisions. Question topics included the financial impact of repair costs, repair delays and the reasons behind them, awareness of the right-to-repair movement and access to affordable parts, and perceptions of independent repair shops versus dealerships. The survey data provided a statistical foundation for identifying nationwide trends, measuring the extent of financial hardship, and understanding consumer perceptions of the repair process.

1,001 responses were collected throughout September 2024 from participants across the United States. Each respondent was required to have experienced a vehicle collision within the past 5 years to ensure the data reflected current industry dynamics.

Quotas were set to ensure our sample reflected the 2024 nationwide distribution of household income (HHI): 36% of respondents had an HHI under \$50,000 annually (low income), 30% had an HHI between \$50,000 and \$100,000 annually (middle income), and 34% had an annual HHI over \$100,000 (high income). The results were a statistically representative sample of American drivers 18+ who have recently experienced a collision (Fig 2).

The survey data was analyzed in Qualtrics using descriptive and inferential statistics, with particular attention given to identifying significant patterns and relationships among repair costs, repair delays, parts availability, and financial impact. Where appropriate, cross-tabulations were used to explore correlations between variables, such as household income and the financial impact of repair costs. Our results were calculated using a 95% confidence interval with a 3.1% margin of error.

### QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

To complement the survey data, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted over the phone throughout October 2024 to gather nuanced, personal stories from consumers across the United States who had recently experienced a vehicle collision. Interview topics included the impact of rising repair costs and repair delays on participants' daily lives, financial stability, emotional well-being, and their awareness and opinions regarding alternative parts and right-to-repair legislation. These interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences with collision repair and interactions with repair shops and dealerships, providing valuable insight into the challenges faced by drivers nationwide.

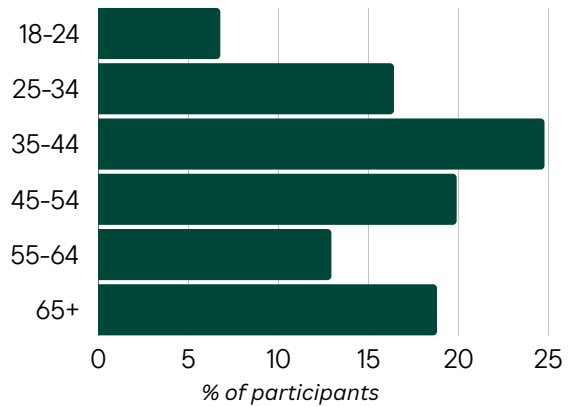
We recruited our initial batch of interviewees from survey respondents who expressed a willingness to share their stories in more detail in the survey. We supplemented this sample with interviewees recruited from the User Interviews platform and Reddit. Efforts were made to ensure the inclusion of diverse voices covering various regions and income levels and verify that our participants were 1) 18 years of age or older, 2) residents of the United States, and 3) had experienced a collision within the last five years.

After conducting the fifty interviews, the results were coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software. A reflexive thematic analysis approach was employed to identify key themes. Selected interview excerpts and direct quotes from these interviews are included throughout the report to contextualize the statistical findings and bring consumers' experiences to the forefront.

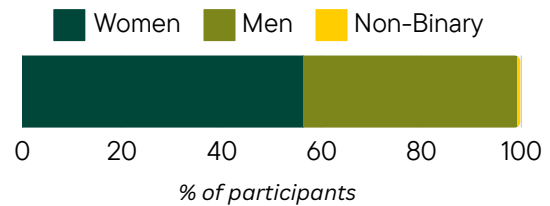
Figure 2. **Survey Sample Statistics** N=1,001

United States 18+ drivers who have experienced a collision within the last 5 years.

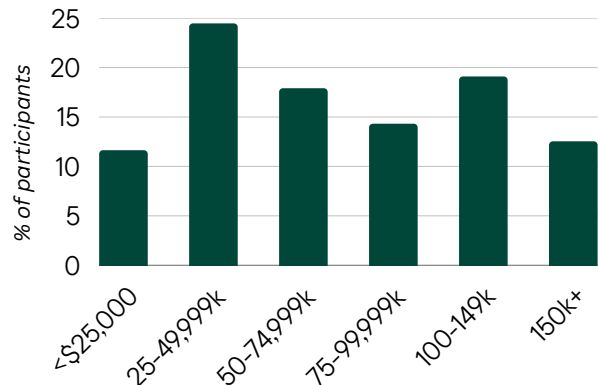
#### Age



#### Gender



#### Annual Household Income



## LIMITATIONS

While this report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, we acknowledge that our research study had three limitations.

### **Sample Representation**

Although efforts were made to recruit a diverse participant pool, the findings may not fully capture regional or demographic variations across the United States. Although the sample was designed to represent the HHI distribution in the United States, the recruitment methods, including platforms like Reddit, may introduce some selection bias.

### **Self-Reported Data**

Both survey and interview data rely on participants' recollections and self-reported experiences, which may introduce biases or inaccuracies. The reliance on self-reported experiences means that some responses may be subject to recall bias or individual perception differences.

### **Scope of Analysis**

This report focuses on drivers' experiences; as such, it does not delve deeply into insurer or manufacturer perspectives. This research focuses exclusively on consumer experiences and does not include perspectives from repair professionals, insurance companies, or car manufacturers.

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Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach provides a robust and comprehensive understanding of the consumer impact, offering valuable insights for advocacy and policy development.

## RESULTS

In this section, we integrate findings from both our survey and interviews, organizing them around broader themes that emerged during analysis. This approach provides a comprehensive view of

consumer experiences, perceptions, and the systemic factors driving rising collision repair costs and their associated impacts.

## **RISING REPAIR COSTS AND STICKER SHOCK**

Our interviews highlighted a common experience of "sticker shock" – disbelief and dismay at the unexpectedly high cost of collision repairs, especially when the damage appears minimal. Several interviewees were astonished by repair bills that seemed disproportionate to the damage. When we reference our survey data, 78% of participants found collision repair prices to be slightly or much higher in the past year compared to previous years. They frequently noted that the cost of repairs felt inflated in their open-ended responses. This sentiment is widely shared among our interviewees.

“It was mostly cosmetic... and the bill still came out to something like \$16,000, \$18,000. It was just confusing.” – Elliot P.

The sticker shock created significant financial stress. Some participants felt trapped between the desire to maintain their vehicle and the reality of repair costs that seemed unaffordable or unwise to pay.

“My initial reaction was, no way. I could never do this... I instantly knew my whole life was going to change.” – Christopher S.

When we asked our survey participants to note the reason for inflated repair costs, 59% cited rising part prices, and 56% reported increased labor costs. The survey's comments section gave us more insights into what or who consumers perceived to be at fault for these ballooning estimates. Respondents' answers were all over the map, especially regarding responsibility for rising repair costs. Participants pointed fingers at body shops, dealerships, insurance providers, mechanics, laborers, and the government. Still, there was no clear trend, indicating a broader lack of awareness or understanding about the factors driving repair costs.



Confusion around the root cause of rising collision repair costs might also highlight how different personal experiences and knowledge gaps shape people's perceptions. Overall, it indicates an opportunity for more education and advocacy to clarify the underlying causes of rising prices and help consumers make informed judgments.



Still, our interviews revealed widespread frustration among drivers, who frequently attributed high repair costs to structural factors within the industry rather than individual circumstances. There was a consensus that greed was a driving factor. These insights underscored the perception of systemic inefficiency. Interviewees commonly described feeling exploited by the high prices of dealerships and mechanics. There was a sense that repair costs were unjustifiably marked up, making car ownership increasingly unaffordable.

“I've worked in the supply chain side of things where they sold auto parts. I know what the markup is on these types of things.... If you were to pay this stuff out of pocket, I don't even understand how people would do it most of the time.” - Ryan B.

“...the parts are being overcharged, it's a price from the factory and then a price from probably the sales rep or whoever is distributing, and then the price at the mechanics are put on. So it's like there is no end to it.” - Josie S.

“I just don't think the average person can afford to be gouged every time they turn around... we're limited on our resources.” - Brigid O.

Many of our interviewees felt that repair shops and dealerships routinely overcharged, citing parts markups and inflated labor fees as major concerns. Some even wondered if the costs could be associated with union wages and overhead, but all agreed that these expenses translated to unmanageable bills for consumers. Dealerships, in particular, were criticized for charging exorbitant prices. Sherry T. was particularly adamant about only using independent repair shops after her experience at the dealership (see her story on page 9).

“The original amount with the dealership was going to be so expensive... it's just like a pile of bricks.” - Teresa A.

“...I would consider going to a dealer. But when you look at cost comparison, I mean it's just astronomical and it's just not affordable.” - Maria C.

Many respondents opted for independent mechanics to avoid high repair costs. However, others attributed high repair costs to the independent mechanics. Multiple interviewees shared anecdotes of perceived scams and inconsistent pricing at independent repair shops, adding to distrust in the industry. Our interviewees noted concerns about overcharging or substandard repairs, with some participants feeling compelled to seek second opinions.

“I did notice that the parts of labor were quite high, and the labor seemed to be artificially inflated by a regional cartel-like system.” - Elliot P.

“I thought they were trying to rip me off, so I had to go to another [shop] [sic] so that I may know how to compare the prices, and the prices are quite different.” - Trevor W.



## CONSUMERS IN FOCUS

 Sherry T.

 Greensboro, NC

Sherry, a retired senior, participated in the interview to share her experience with repair costs after a collision. What began as a seemingly minor accident left Sherry and her husband shocked by the financial aftermath. Despite the visible damage appearing small, their repair bill ballooned to \$7,500 after taking the car to a dealership. “It was damaged on the side a little bit, but didn’t look major. That’s why we were so shocked at the cost,” Sherry explained.

Although they paid only a \$500 to \$1,000 deductible, their insurance rates skyrocketed: “The cost of the increase in the insurance was huge. And that has haunted us for several years,” Sherry said, emphasizing how this unexpected expense impacted their lifestyle. They had to cut back on outings and manage the burden of their new financial reality.

Beyond the financial stress, Sherry experienced the emotional toll of losing her independence. Her daily schedule, filled with medical appointments and errands, became a logistical nightmare without a car. “To be without a car is... devastating,” Sherry shared. While ride-sharing options like Uber and Lyft exist, she felt uncomfortable relying on them.

Sherry’s story showcases the ripple effect a collision can have on consumers. Between the dealership’s high repair costs and subsequent insurance premium hikes, her experience sheds light on the urgent need for consumer-friendly repair practices. Sherry firmly believes in fair auto repair pricing and supports the availability of alternative repair options to alleviate the financial strain on families like hers.

***“[THE DEALERSHIP] CHARGED AN EXORBITANT AMOUNT OF MONEY TO FIX [OUR CAR]... I JUST COULDN'T BELIEVE THE MATERIALS.”***

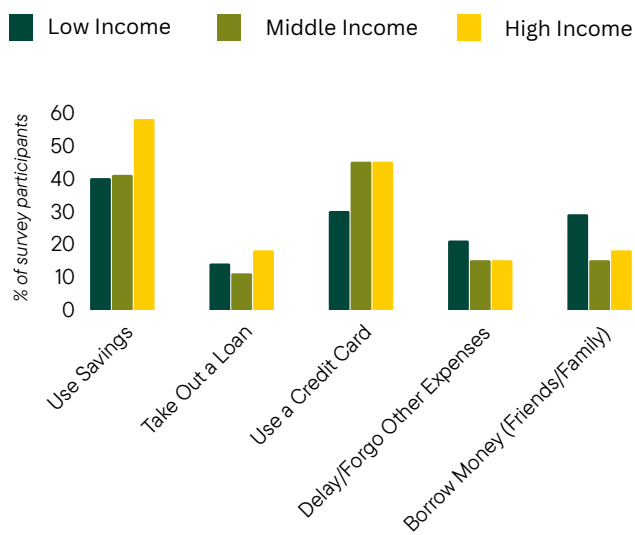
## THE UNEVEN FINANCIAL BURDEN OF RISING REPAIR COSTS

Rising repair costs did not affect all drivers equally; low-income households were disproportionately impacted, exacerbating pre-existing financial vulnerability. Our interview data highlighted the profound and unequal financial strain that collision repair costs impose on drivers nationwide. The status of participants' overall finances before their collision significantly influenced their response. Less well-off drivers experienced compounded difficulties, such as delaying repairs, borrowing money from family, or making difficult choices about other essential expenses. In contrast, others only had to make lifestyle adjustments and cut back on discretionary spending. Kristin K, a longtime insurance industry professional in our sample, recalled, "Some people were really, really struggling with being able to fix their cars."

Our survey data reinforced the reality of these disparities, revealing that low-income households were significantly more likely to borrow money from friends and family or rely on loans to cover repair costs. Meanwhile, high-income households were more likely to use savings and have greater financial flexibility in dealing with unexpected expenses. We explore these different responses in the following subsections (Fig 3).

Figure 3. **The Unequal Financial Strain of Rising Repair Costs**

How drivers paid for their collision repair bill by household income level.



## Reliance on Savings and Emergency Funds

A recurring theme for participants was the depletion of savings and the financial anxiety that came with it – 42.7% of survey participants used their savings to cover repair costs. Multiple interview participants also reported having to use their emergency funds or savings, leaving them feeling insecure about future expenses.

“...I pull from my emergency fund and savings, but it's still really scary...I feel like I worked so hard for the money and then it's gone just from something like that, so small. And then once I lose that money, I also feel nervous and I feel like I have to build it up again.” – Mindy F.

In open-ended survey questions, respondents frequently mentioned "lost savings" or "dipping into savings," signaling a widespread reduction in financial reserves. They also mentioned the inability to "recoup losses," which may indicate that these savings aren't being replenished, leading to a potential long-term reduction in financial security. This depletion of savings affected the respondents' sense of financial stability, especially when these funds were intended for emergencies or future needs.

## Long-Term Financial Strain and Emotional Impact

The financial burden of collision repair often lingered long after our respondents' initial repair bills were paid. Our survey showed disparities in persistent financial strain. Households making less than \$50,000 annually were more likely to still be paying off their repair costs six months or more after the initial incident (Chi-Squared Test, P-Value: <0.0000300). Our interviews supported this finding further, with participants detailing ongoing financial stress like navigating debt, losing savings, and paying higher insurance premiums after the collision.

“I was strapped for income. I was already stuck before it happened, but it really affected me... It was just a big mess. Insurance [went] up, all kinds of stuff.” – James M.

In our open-ended survey questions, terms like "financially strained" and "financial stability" were explicitly noted, showing that many respondents felt a broader, ongoing financial impact beyond immediate repair cost. This drain on savings without a clear path to replenish them could lead to more significant long-term challenges, particularly if repair costs remain high or become a recurring issue. For some, the impact may also extend into limited access to future opportunities due to depleted financial resources.

### Extreme Measures Taken

For many, the financial strain forced them to take drastic measures, such as selling personal belongings, using credit cards and incurring interest, or quitting jobs due to lack of reliable transportation. Survey findings showed that 39.7% of respondents resorted to using credit cards to pay for repairs, often incurring interest that added to their long-term debt. Additionally, 20.3% borrowed from friends or family, and some even mentioned taking out loans. Our interviews reinforced this finding, illustrating the extreme actions individuals felt compelled to take to handle the financial pressure caused by collision repairs.

“I had to take some clothes and sneakers [to sell]... the Nikes that I love so much, they had to go.” – James M.

“I was working a second shift... I couldn't get home at 2:33 AM in the morning unless I walked for hours... I loved that job and I said, ‘Hey, I'm sorry guys, but I'm going to have to find something [else]...’” - Jason A.

“It was very difficult. I'm already basically at, I make no extra money for food even, and I don't get enough food stamps [because I am] disabled, they say I make too much, so they only give me \$23... So it took away all the extra money that I even on short on bill. I had to shuffle, pay bills late.” - Jocelyn R

Deja W. shared a particularly harrowing story of how rising collision repair costs and total losses led her to homelessness (see her story is on page 12).

### Lifestyle Adjustments and Spending Cuts

Many interviewees had to cut back on non-essential spending, postpone purchases, or forgo vacations and leisure activities after a collision. The severity of their cutbacks was heavily dependent on their financial situation.

“It affected me personally because I like to take vacations out of the country every two months just to relax, and I couldn't do that. I had to pay to get my car fixed.” - Kimberly P.

“I didn't have a lot of money because I had to pay \$500 deductible to get my Buick in the repair shop. And that \$500 in this economy is quite a bit for a working mom of two kids. So, I did have to sacrifice that month getting things I actually probably needed.” - Melena B.

Our survey data strongly supported this reality – 45% of survey respondents had to make spending cuts, especially on entertainment and discretionary activities, to cover repair costs and maintain their budgets for essentials. Survey respondents reported cutting back on discretionary spending, with phrases like "less going out" or "less entertainment."

Common substitutions for lost spending included more cost-conscious behaviors, such as "bargain shopping" or "using coupons." This shows a shift toward more intentional spending to offset the financial impact, affecting personal quality of life and reducing spending in other economic areas, amplifying the negative effects of collision repair costs on a broader scale.

### Impacts on Small Business Owners

Rising collision repair costs had cascading impacts on the small business owners in our sample. Laura V. owned her vehicle outright before her car was totaled in 2020 in a near-fatal collision while commuting in winter weather. She recalled the negative impact on her business, including incurring debt.

# CONSUMERS IN FOCUS

 Deja W.

 Parker Heights, TX



Deja had one of the most heart-wrenching stories about the impact of high collision repair costs on her life. Before her total loss collision, Deja was a gig worker, delivering food and groceries throughout her area in Texas. The circumstances around the collision were ambiguous; nonetheless, Deja was determined to be at fault, leaving her without the option for a rental car. Deja had \$5,000 remaining on her vehicle and was looking forward to having it paid off.

The payout for her total loss went to her remaining loan, leaving her with no funds to purchase a new vehicle. Without her car and with unstable housing, Deja has done what she can to get by. Public transit is unreliable, so she walks to physical tasking jobs. She shares, “It just seems like I just keep getting Ls (*read: losses*). Before I was able to work in a whole other city... [now] even if a job is in the same city, it's still not really walkable distance. I'm walking hours.”

The loss of her vehicle set off a domino effect that led her deep into poverty. She temporarily lived with family, friends, and even strangers, but ultimately, ended up homeless. She had only recently been divorced before her accident and was working toward building her finances and getting her own place. Now, she describes her situation as one of despair and turmoil. She vehemently supports a robust aftermarket and the right to repair: “We're all a paycheck away from some undesirable situations. The last thing we need to do is shell out a \$1,000, \$500, or go without... My life would definitely had been better if I still had my car, and probably paid off by now, too, so I could have been looking into another investment of a vehicle that could have been family generational wealth.”

***“I WAS ALREADY STRUGGLING ENOUGH, BUT [HAVING MY VEHICLE TOTALED AFTER THE WRECK] LED ME INTO POVERTY. IT REALLY DID.”***

“As a small business owner, it was very difficult because I had to rely on credit cards for a while. So that basically put me in debt for about a year and I was taking care of my parents, as well. So I'm just pulling out of that and this is 2024.” - Laura V.

Laura, despite the immense challenge of almost losing her small business, managed to bounce back, albeit four years after the collision. Josie, however, has not been so lucky – we explore her experience in the case study on page 14.

## **THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF RISING COLLISION REPAIR COSTS**

Survey data is limited in dealing with the emotional nuances of rising collision repair. However, our interview data vividly depicted the profound emotional toll that rising collision repair costs impose on individuals and families. Our interviews gave us a window into the complexities of the mental health impact of increasing collision repair costs. Four sub-themes rose to the surface as we analyzed our data.

### **Feeling Trapped and Vulnerable**

When it came to collision repair, our interviewees described feeling powerless and vulnerable to dealerships and repair shops, lamenting a perceived lack of affordable alternatives. This vulnerability was compounded by the frustration of knowing that their options for affordable parts and repairs remained limited despite paying car payments or insurance premiums.

“It's almost as if they [car manufacturers] don't want you to feel like you have an option...it's almost like they're making it where you have to go to them.” - Teresa A.

### **Financial Anxiety and Long-Term Strain**

The financial burden of repairs often led to heightened stress and anxiety. Many interviewees spoke of the mental strain of having to use emergency savings, accrue debt, or take on extra work to cover repair costs.

“I feel like I worked so hard for the money and then it's gone... it's a lot of added stress.” - Mindy F.

This theme aligns with the personal accounts of financial strain shared in the interviews, emphasizing how repair costs can erode financial security and add pressure to consumers who are already stretched thin. For instance, Sarah's car was totaled after her collision, forcing her to add to her already-packed workload so she could purchase a new vehicle.

“...taking on a car payment means that [for the next seven years] I need to take on two additional clients per month and I am already seeing more clients than I want to see and I'm a little burned out.” - Sarah B.

### **Declining Mental Health and Well-Being**

The emotional and psychological impact of dealing with car repairs was another common thread. Interviewees reported feelings of helplessness, stress, and even depression.

“It has just literally destroyed me. Very, very difficult financial impact, very difficult, emotional and physical impact.” - Carol S.

“I ended up in depression because [the car] played a part in my assets and investment, so moving from this step to zero led me to be depressed, and I was not financially prepared for such at all.” - Tevin J.

This trend was strongly supported by the survey data, which showed that the stress of managing repair costs was consistently high across all income levels, with no statistically significant difference based on household income (Chi-Squared Test, P-Value: 0.0920). This highlighted the universal nature of the emotional toll of collision repair costs (Fig 4).

# CONSUMERS IN FOCUS

 Josie S.

 Colombia, MD



Josie participated in our interview to talk about a wreck in her personal vehicle, but the hardships she experienced from collisions as a transit business owner were particularly profound. Josie had to make the tough decision to close her business after two of her company vehicles were involved in collisions, losing a significant investment and putting three employees back on the job market. For example, a no-fault collision in one of her transit vehicles caused \$20,000 in damages, leading her insurer to total her vehicle. The loss was devastating for Josie: “I had invested in this company, hundreds of thousands of dollars, and I closed it... the cost of fixing versus or also the cost of insurance can put people out of jobs and out of businesses.”

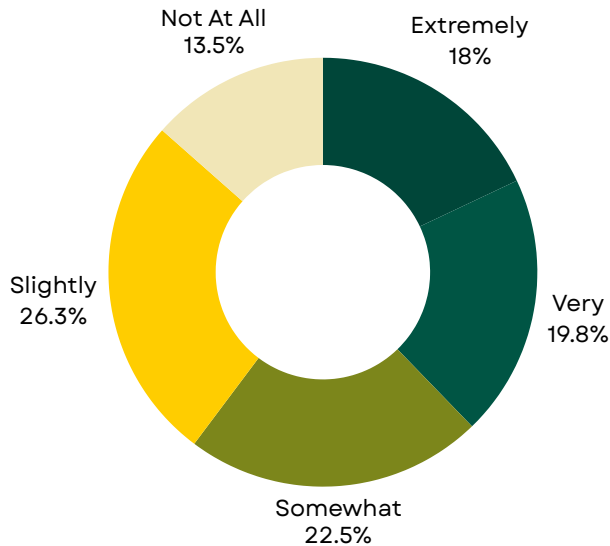
Before the decision to close the business, she experienced waits of up to two to three months to get replacement parts, jeopardizing her business. She recalled, “A hundred thousand dollars were supposed to be coming in were not coming in for the business. That contributed to why, at the end of two years, I closed the business, and it’s still in debt.”

To get her parts from the Dodge dealership would have been double the price the mechanic found. Still, the cost of the replacement parts was unmanageable. Had they not been as high, Josie might still be in business today, perhaps even expanding her operations. She wholeheartedly supports the aftermarket and believes in consumers’ right to repair.

***“IF WE COULD HAVE THE SAME TYPE OF PARTS FOR LESS MONEY, HOW UNFAIR IS THAT? THAT WE HAVE NO ACCESS TO IT... IF IT STAYS IN THE HANDS OF JUST A FEW, [IT’S A] MONOPOLY.”***

Figure 4. **Rising Collision Repair Costs are Stressful for Everyone**

How stressful, from Extremely to Not at All, that survey respondents rated their collision repair experience.



A less prevalent but noteworthy trend we noticed was the impact that the loss of independence and the inability to fulfill daily tasks had on our older interviewees. Waiting on collision repairs compounded emotional distress for older adults and others who rely heavily on their vehicles for appointments and socializing.

### Impact on Family and Relationships

Our survey data illustrated how repair delays caused significant disruptions in participants' daily lives, including difficulties commuting to work or school (36.6%) and missing necessary appointments or events (28.2%). These disruptions have a direct impact on family time and responsibilities. Our interviews gave even more texture to how the strain impacted family dynamics. Interview participant Kael W. recounted how the financial and logistical challenges of collision repair affected their ability to care for and spend time with their loved ones.

During a cross-state haul, Kael suffered a collision in his work truck and had to pull from his savings to finance the necessary repairs. He needed to replenish the funds immediately to care for his loved ones. This meant adding additional hauls to his schedule and losing crucial time with his family. Being away was particularly hard because his son was experiencing emotional distress and needed him. His absence put a strain on their relationship.

“I had to work more... it’s something that really affected me mentally because I was not there for my family when they needed me.” – Kael W.

Felicia B’s 2021 Buick Concord was held up in the repair shop for over a month due to part delays after a metal plate on the Union Pacific Railroad tracks dislodged and damaged her undercarriage. Felicia did not have a rental car rider and could not afford to Uber everywhere she needed to go, which meant missing critical time with her ailing mother, and letting down her children.

“I was unable to get to my mom [in the hospital] who, at the time, I didn’t know she was on a downward spiral as far as her health... I was unable to tote my teenage boy around... and my daughter wasn’t able to get to grocery stores...it put my stress level through the roof.” – Felicia B.

Our survey data supports this sub-theme. We found that those who reported borrowing from family and friends to cover collision repair costs (primarily reported by low-income households) more often rated their collision repair experience as either very or extremely stressful.

## PARTS AVAILABILITY AND THE IMPACT OF REPAIR DELAYS

A recurring frustration among participants was extensive delays in repairing vehicles, often exacerbated by parts shortages and inefficiencies in communication. Our survey data showed that 44% of respondents experienced delays in their repair, and 41% reported repairs taking three weeks or more (Fig 5). The interviews provided more nuance on delays' financial and emotional impact on drivers. Many participants shared stories of repair timelines stretching far beyond initial estimates, creating immense inconveniences. Delays of several weeks or even months were common, often due to backorders. Indeed, the availability of parts, exacerbated by unfair market practices that limit part sources, significantly contributes to delays.



## REPAIR COSTS, INSURANCE, AND TOTAL LOSSES

Insurance emerged as a complex and divisive topic in our research. For some, insurance provided critical relief, covering repair costs beyond their deductibles and reducing financial stress. For others, deductibles posed significant challenges, particularly for low-income households who were forced to delay other expenses or seek financial help. Lower-income drivers were less likely to carry comprehensive coverage, leaving them more vulnerable to unexpected repair costs and creating a clear gap in affordability and protection.

The issue of vehicle totals emerged as a significant source of stress. Over half of survey respondents (56.3%) reported experiencing a total loss, a trend exacerbated by rising repair costs and parts shortages. Interviewees often described cars being totaled not due to extensive damage but because repair costs exceeded the vehicle's value, driven by high part prices and supply chain delays. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened these issues, making parts more challenging to source and repairs economically unfeasible.

Participants highlighted the financial strain caused by total losses, with many feeling under-compensated for their vehicles and left in worse financial positions. Structural inefficiencies—like inflated part costs and supply chain challenges—disproportionately impacted drivers, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms to address affordability, consumer protection, and competition within the auto repair and insurance industries.

“

“It took about four months for the new part to come in.” – Julie B.

“[They] had to [sic] special order parts [and] had to take some time to get delivered because they weren't in stock at their warehouse.” – George L.

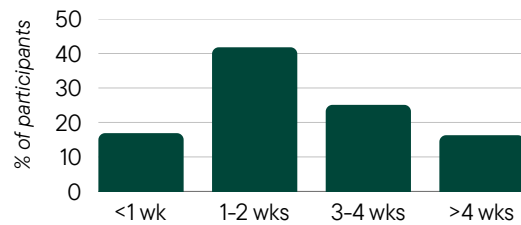
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Prolonged repair times often meant running out of rental car coverage provided by insurance or having to pay for alternative transportation. This created a ripple effect of financial strain, adding to the already high cost of vehicle ownership and repair.

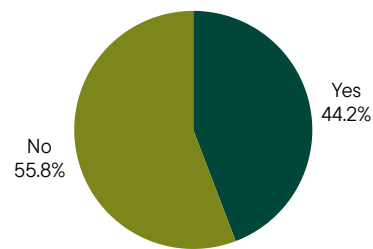
The uncertainty around repair timelines led to significant stress and anxiety. Interviewees felt trapped in a cycle of unanswered questions and indefinite delays, taking a toll on their mental well-being. Our survey results quantified this impact. For those who did experience delays, many reported significant disturbances in their daily life, including difficulty commuting to work or school (37%), increased expenses (37%), and an inability to attend important appointments or events (28%).

Figure 5. **The Impact of Repair Delays on U.S. Drivers**

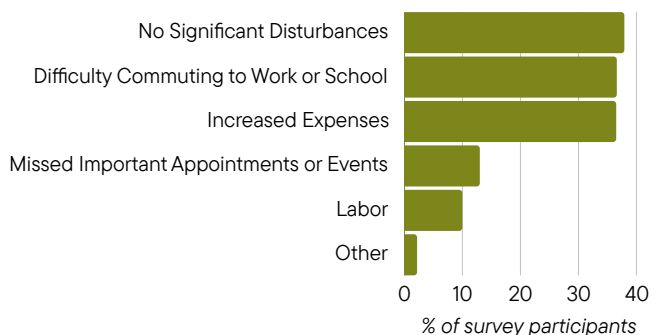
How long did it take to complete the repairs after your last collision?



Were there any delays in completing the collision repairs?



If there were delays, did this create any significant disturbances in your daily life, (selecting all that apply)?



## COMPETITION, THE AFTERMARKET, AND THE RIGHT TO REPAIR

Sentiment analysis indicated that most respondents viewed repair costs negatively, associating them with "financial strain" and "hardship." Neutral or positive views were minimal, suggesting a broadly held dissatisfaction with current collision repair structures. This collective sentiment substantiates our advocacy goals, revealing a strong public interest in solutions that address affordability and accessibility in collision repair.

A strong theme among interviewees was the value of competition and the belief that monopolistic practices in the auto repair industry harm consumers. Many participants emphasized the need for legislation to promote fair competition, ensuring access to affordable and high-quality alternative parts. This aligned with our survey findings – 75% of respondents supported the introduction of legislation to provide access to alternative, competitively priced parts (Fig 7).

Interviewees frequently voiced concerns about the ever-increasing costs of car repairs, emphasizing the importance of having access to affordable, quality alternative parts (Fig 6). Explanations centered around the importance of competitive markets for driving down prices and providing consumers with options. Indeed, our data indicated a strong desire across income levels for affordable repair options, signaling a widespread recognition of the need for systemic relief.

“Anything that a consumer can benefit from to keep a vehicle is positive... It's getting harder and harder to operate and own a vehicle due to the cost.” – Laura V.

The economic realities of inflation and high living costs made these affordable repair options even more essential to our participants. Interviewees highlighted how a lack of alternatives exacerbates their financial strain, particularly those with limited income.

“Not everybody has the kind of credit or money to just repair a car... It'll make it more accessible.” – Tommy A.

## LIMITS OF PUBLIC TRANSIT

It can be tempting to respond to respondents' hardships by suggesting they rely on public transit; however, as our interviewees illustrated, reliable and widespread public transit is a rare luxury, not a given, in the United States. The interviewees highlighted the significant limitations of public transportation, emphasizing how inadequate or nonexistent systems leave many with no viable alternative to owning a car.

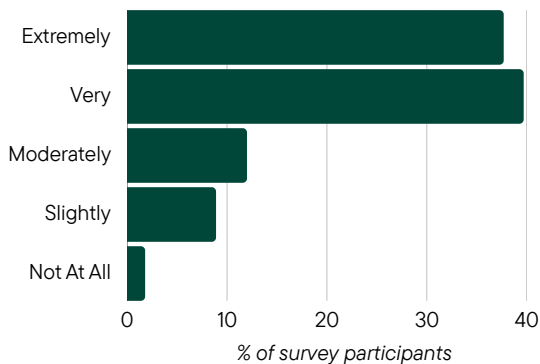
Many participants expressed frustration with the lack of public transit options, especially in suburban and rural areas. This absence left residents heavily reliant on personal vehicles. Those with access to public transit described it as inefficient and unreliable, leading to wasted time and logistical challenges. Participants pointed out that ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft are often prohibitively expensive, and walking in areas without sidewalks can be dangerous. The unreliability of buses and ride-share cancellations also added to their concerns.

Personal vehicles are a vital part of daily life for countless Americans. When car repairs become unaffordable, they create significant barriers that extend beyond financial strain, affecting economic and social mobility. Ultimately, we are a car-dependent nation, and our citizens need a car-centered safety net and options that keep repair costs reasonable.

“With everything in the world today and the economics going on in our country alone, things continue to go up and up and up. If we have an opportunity to have reputable people make something cheaper for us, that would be great. That would be something that's essential. The cost of living is incredible. Instead of making things cheaper for us, they're making them more expensive.” Robert J.

These sentiments match our survey results, where 78% of our survey participants said having affordable repair options available was ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ important. Still, while there was strong support for cheaper, alternative parts, some interviewees emphasized the importance of maintaining quality and safety. They suggested that alternative parts meet rigorous standards and carry warranties to be a viable option.

Figure 6. **Ranking the Importance of Alternative Part Options for Collision Repair**



Many participants expressed frustration with the monopoly-like hold that car manufacturers have over collision repair parts. Interviewees had an innate sense of the broader economic impact of monopolistic practices. They argued that allowing independent shops to source parts more freely would increase competition, ultimately benefiting consumers by lowering prices and stimulating the economy.

“If there's not accessibility... then I see the dealership charging whatever they want, and I don't like that.” – Heidi W.

“It helps the economy when there's not a monopoly on what the price should be.” – Meredith S.

“I think it should be a free competitive market. I think that would benefit me as the consumer.” – Trevor W.

While many interviewees supported increased competition, some acknowledged the importance of protecting manufacturers’ intellectual property, suggesting a balance should be struck, perhaps by limiting patent durations or introducing licensing fees for third-party part manufacturers.

Regarding the right to repair, interview participants stressed the need for independent shops to have equal access to parts. They highlighted how this would not only introduce competition and drive down prices but also give consumers more control over their repair options.

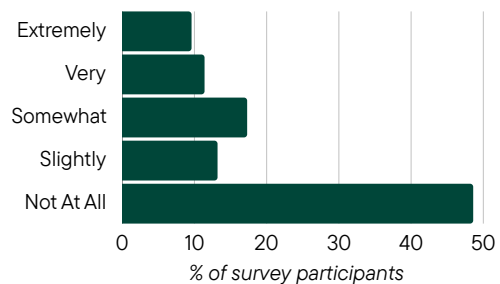
“[Car manufacturers] got to be more practical. They can't monopolize the automotive industry. And that's what I feel like is happening. It's like you got to give some of the power back to the people that are buying your cars.” – Jason A.

“I do believe independent shops should be able to get all the parts needed... competition's part of American business.” – Lance X.

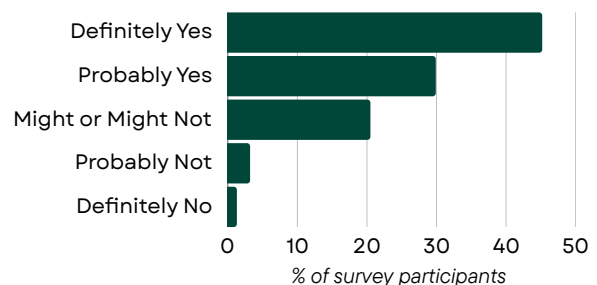
Despite almost half of our survey respondents being unaware of the right-to-repair legislation like the REPAIR and SMART Acts, 75% said they would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ support legislation that protects the right to access affordable collision repair parts and services; only 1% reported they would not be amenable to this legislation.

Figure 7. **Awareness and Attitudes Towards the Right to Repair**

Are you **aware** of right-to-repair legislation?



Do you **support** legislation that protects the right to access affordable collision repair parts and services?



“I support the right to repair and think that the creep of intellectual property restrictions is probably bad for the consumer. It's an expense to the consumer for the benefit of the few.” – Elliot P.

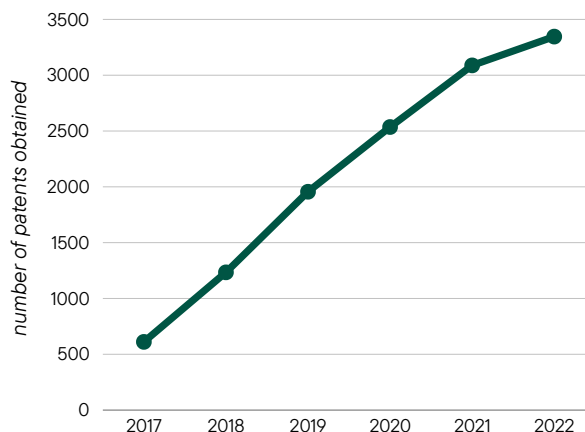
“I would definitely support it because, as a consumer, we're paying our insurance premiums on top. We should be able to have an option when we are getting service to our vehicles. And then we pay the car payments on our vehicles. We should be able to have that choice as to how we want our cars repaired.” – Teresa A.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The findings from our research highlight a troubling reality: **the financial impact of rising auto repair prices is not just an inconvenience—it's a significant strain that disrupts the economic stability and well-being of countless American drivers.** Our data shows how repair costs force people to dip into their savings, rely on credit, or make tough compromises on essential expenses. Car owners across the board are feeling the impacts. The burden falls heaviest on low-income households. For them, an unexpected collision repair can set off a cascade of financial stress, forcing families to choose between necessities like groceries and healthcare or keeping their vehicles on the road. There is an urgent need for accessible and affordable repair solutions to safeguard the quality of life of American drivers.

When we put our findings into the context of legislative and economic trends in the automotive industry, we see that collision repair has long been a battleground between consumer rights and manufacturer control. Independent repair shops have historically provided an affordable alternative to expensive dealership services. Still, the increasing complexity of modern vehicles and the explosion of design patents on repair parts have shifted the balance of power decisively in favor of vehicle manufacturers (Fig 8). The 2021 Federal Trade Commission's "Nixing the Fix" report echoes this sentiment—when OEMs restrict access to parts, manuals, and diagnostic tools, consumer choices shrink, and costs rise. Independent repair shops lose the ability to compete, leaving consumers to bear the burden.

Figure 8. **Cumulative Design Patents Obtained by Vehicle Manufacturers** from 2017 to July 2022 (from Sarnoff 2022 (Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, Honda, Nissan, Toyota))



### GROWING PART COMPLEXITY

Between 2017 and 2023, vehicles became significantly more complex, integrating advanced technologies and safety features. Modern bumpers, for example, evolved from simple structural components to high-tech systems housing sensors, cameras, and radar for features like adaptive cruise control and parking assistance. These advancements enhanced safety and functionality and increased repair costs, making even minor collisions expensive. However, this complexity alone does not explain why some collision parts are priced significantly above their manufacturing cost or Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP). These markups are often unrelated to the technological complexity of the bumper itself but instead reflect broader market dynamics and dealership price gouging.

The economic and social implications of unchecked repair costs extend well beyond individual hardship; they pose a direct challenge to the principles of fairness and market competition that Americans value. Research has shown that by controlling parts supply chains and restricting access to affordable, high-quality alternatives, manufacturers and dealerships artificially inflate costs, driving up the cost of vehicle ownership.

Numerous bills have been drafted to support the right to repair and foster competition in the aftermarket parts industry. For instance, the REPAIR Act proposes actionable steps to dismantle anti-competitive barriers by making diagnostic information, vehicle data, and repair tools accessible to everyone—not just dealerships. The SMART Act specifically targets the use of design patents that car manufacturers use to restrict competition and inflate the cost of replacement parts. This type of legislation is exactly what drivers need to level the playing field between dealerships and independent repair shops.

The overall implications of our findings are clear and multifaceted. First, **we urgently need policy changes that protect consumer rights and foster fair competition.** Legislation supporting the right to repair would empower independent shops and give consumers more choices, ultimately driving down collision repair costs. These legislative changes align with the values of competition and fairness central to the American economy. We hope this research rallies public support for change by highlighting the concrete impacts of these issues on everyday American's lives.

Second, **our research highlights the economic and social importance of reliable transportation.** For many Americans, a personal vehicle is essential for getting to work, accessing healthcare, and fulfilling family responsibilities—especially in areas where public transit isn't a viable alternative. When repair costs or delays force drivers off the road, the consequences are far-reaching, impacting job security, healthcare access, and social mobility. Addressing the affordability crisis in vehicle repair isn't just about economics; it's about preserving the social fabric that allows people to participate fully in their communities.

Finally, **we cannot ignore the emotional and psychological toll of dealing with the current repair ecosystem.** The uncertainty around repair timelines and the financial stress of unexpected expenses add an extra layer of anxiety that affects drivers' well-being. These findings emphasize the need for greater transparency, efficiency, and stronger consumer protections throughout the repair process.

We hope this research triggers broader conversations around fairness, accessibility, and economic justice in the auto industry and spurs legislative action to safeguard competitive markets

and protect consumers. **The evidence is clear: more competition, transparency, and consumer choice would not only reduce costs but also improve the quality of life for millions of American drivers.** We hope that displaying the real-world impact of these legislative efforts reinvigorates commitment to public interest and competition. Additionally, we aim to illustrate how broader shifts in government policies—from lenient patent practices to tariffs—trickle down to harm consumers. As we consider pathways forward, we must prioritize policies that balance manufacturer interests with the needs of the everyday people who rely on their vehicles to navigate daily life.

## THE ABPA RECOMMENDS...

To protect consumers and restore fairness in the auto repair market, we recommend that all stakeholders—legislators, manufacturers, and industry advocates—support right-to-repair legislation, such as the REPAIR Act and the SMART Act. These legislative measures are essential to improve data access for independent repair shops, dismantle monopolistic practices, and foster a more competitive and equitable repair ecosystem. We also urge manufacturers to actively collaborate with independent service providers by sharing diagnostic tools and information to reduce repair costs for consumers.

For more information on these bills, please visit our website at <https://www.autobpa.com/advocacy/federal-issu>

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