

Short Comment Regarding a Proposed Exemption Under 17 U.S.C. 1201

Item 1. Commenter Information

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This comment is filed by the Free Software Foundation, a charitable corporation founded in 1985. The Foundation is the largest single contributor to the GNU operating system (used widely today in its GNU/Linux variant). The Foundation's GNU General Public License is the most widely used free software license, covering major components of the GNU operating system and tens of thousands of other computer programs used on hundreds of millions of computers around the world.

Item 2. Proposed Class Addressed

Proposed Class 17: Jailbreaking—All-Purpose Mobile Computing Devices.

Item 3. Statement Regarding Proposed Exemption

The GNU/Linux operating system has become one of the most widely used operating systems on the planet. The GNU System and the kernel Linux are called free software, because users are free to study, share and improve the software. Those who promote free software believe that controlling ones own computing should be a universal right.

Digital restrictions interfere with the ability to enjoy these freedoms. Circumventing such restrictions for any non-infringing use should not come with the threat of legal sanction. The process of continually applying for exemptions under 17 U.S.C. 1201 is onerous and instead any circumvention for a non-infringing purpose should be permitted.

However, where exemptions are used to safeguard the public from these laws, it must be the case that exemptions should cover the sharing and distribution of software and instructions for circumventing access controls technologies. Without this, exemptions are near useless, since it would require everyone who wants to act within their scope to write their own software to do so.

Users should have control over any mobile computing device that they own; to be able to install their own software on it, and to remove malicious software from it. Since the last round of exemption proposals, tablet and other non telephone handset mobile computing has exploded in usage. Being able to remove unwanted or malicious software, particularly software that includes location tracking or other monitoring software, is essential for users to be able to control their own computing. For many lower income users, an All-Purpose Mobile Computing Device may be the only general computing device that they own.