

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

Item 1. Commenter Information

Joshua Gay & Donald Robertson, III
Free Software Foundation, Inc.
51 Franklin Street, Fifth Floor
Boston, MA 02110-1335
licensing@fsf.org

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 2: Audiovisual Works—Educational Uses—Primary and Secondary Schools (K-12)

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.

With regard to this particular exemption, we believe students, faculty, staff and community members of K-12 educational institutions have the right to use free software and the right to control their own computing, and so they must be able to circumvent access controls on lawfully made and acquired motion pictures and other audiovisual works for purposes of criticism and comment. The scope of this exemption should be broadened in the following ways: The exemption should apply to any member of a particular K-12 educational institution's community, and not limited to faculty, staff, or enrolled students. The exemption should extend to all formats of digital media with access restrictions, including "streaming" digital media and DVD-like technologies such as Blue-Ray.