

Protecting Iowans from Dishonest Auto Repair Shops

Dishonest auto repair shops will no longer be able to hold a customer's car ransom, in order to coerce payment of a disputed bill, thanks to legislation passed by the Iowa House.

Senate File 2108 will now go to the Governor. If he signs the bill, it will take effect on May 1, 2010.

Under the current Artisan Lien Law, a person who repairs another's property has a lien on the property and may hold it until agreed upon or reasonable compensation is paid for the repair work.

For most items, this does not produce a major hardship on the customer. But when it involves the family auto, the consumer is over a barrel because they need the car to get to work, go to school, and do all the other things a family needs to live.

Even if the repair shop carried out unauthorized repairs, or presents a bill much larger than the estimate, the customer is often forced to pay whatever the shop demands.

Senate File 2108 creates an exception to the law. A car owner may complain to the Attorney General and, after a prompt investigation, if the Attorney General has reason to believe the repair shop has engaged in a deceptive act, the repair shop must return the car within one business day of being notified.

This will not prevent the repair shop from putting a lien on the vehicle or taking any other legal action to collect the bill. However, by returning the vehicle, it will give the average Iowan the ability to stand up to a dishonest auto repair shop.