

# **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**

Class 17: All Works—Accessibility Uses

## **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 one's own computing should be a universal right.

Digital restrictions interfere with the ability to enjoy these freedoms. Circumventing such restrictions for any 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 control 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.

All users have a legitimate right to circumvent controls on audiovisual works, regardless of the medium or the particular use involved. Limiting exemptions to particular users or to narrowly defined uses harms everyone, even those who may fall under existing exemptions. This exemption is a perfect example of the issue, where users who have the right to gain access to works are afraid to do so out of fear of legal consequences. The Copyright Act is not meant to harm users and prevent them from enjoying works in formats that are accessible to them, but that's exactly what happens when exemptions are so limited that determining whether they apply requires a law degree. The exemption should extend to all works on all devices, and to all users, as well as to the sharing of tools needed to make circumvention possible.

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