

Lawmakers Looking To Address Montgomery County's Pawn Problem ▶ PLAY

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Big box retailers are currently prevented from taking in trade-in units in Montgomery County.

A nearly 30-year-old law in Montgomery County is frustrating customers who are looking to trade-in cell phones and other electronics to get the latest versions of them.

When it was passed in 1985, the county's so-called "pawn shop" law prevented stores from giving cash to customers who brought in goods to sell — stores could only give them checks. It was designed to stop criminals who sold stolen goods for cash.

Three decades later, that law is stopping stores like Best Buy and Apple from giving store credits to customers when they bring in their electronics — mostly cell phones and tablets — that are applied to purchasing the latest versions of those devices.

Eric Friedman heads Montgomery County's office of consumer protection and says that, for whatever reason, this part of the pawn shop law was never updated.

"Back in 1985, we didn't have appliances on the marketplace that were typically replaced every few years with new versions. You bought a television, it lasted 20 years and you bought a new one," Friedman says.

The county council will take up a bill when it returns to work next month that would allow stores to offer credits and gift cards, not just written checks.