

PROTECT OUR GAMES ACT (AB 1921)

Community and Cultural Impact: Why California's Proposal Represents a Practical First Step for Consumers, Preservation, and Digital Communities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AB 1921 addresses a growing consumer protection gap in the digital marketplace: the increasing sale of video games that may become partially or entirely unusable when publisher-operated services are discontinued.

The legislation does not require perpetual operation of online servers.

It does not require indefinite technical support.

It does not require companies to maintain unprofitable infrastructure forever.

Instead, AB 1921 establishes reasonable notice requirements and several flexible compliance pathways intended to preserve ordinary consumer use after official support ends.

From a consumer-rights perspective, the bill represents a measured and practical first step. It recognizes an increasingly common reality: a game's commercial lifecycle and a game's community lifecycle are often very different things.

For decades, gaming communities have independently maintained, preserved, restored, hosted, and operated games long after publishers concluded active support. AB 1921 acknowledges this reality and creates pathways for communities to continue preserving experiences that consumers legitimately purchased.

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION PROBLEM

Historically, consumers purchasing a video game reasonably expected continued access to that product.

A cartridge remained playable.

A CD-ROM remained usable.

A downloaded single-player game generally remained functional regardless of future business decisions.

Increasingly, however, modern games depend upon publisher-controlled infrastructure for authentication, matchmaking, progression tracking, or online connectivity. When those services are discontinued, consumers may lose access to substantial portions of a product they purchased.

AB 1921 addresses this concern through a simple principle:

If official support ends, consumers should retain a reasonable avenue toward continued ordinary use.

The bill does not dictate a single technical solution. Instead, it provides operators with multiple compliance pathways while preserving flexibility for different business models and technical architectures.

This approach is notable because it focuses on outcomes rather than implementation details.

Consumers retain access.

Publishers retain flexibility.

Communities retain opportunities to preserve experiences that would otherwise disappear.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Video games are no longer a niche hobby.

They are cultural artifacts, educational tools, social spaces, creative platforms, and historical works enjoyed by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

When a game becomes inaccessible, the loss extends beyond software.

Communities disappear.

User-generated content becomes inaccessible.

Historical records are fragmented.

Shared experiences vanish.

Importantly, player connection does not inherently require ongoing publisher support.

Gaming history demonstrates this repeatedly.

For decades, multiplayer ecosystems operated through third-party or community-driven solutions including:

- DWANGO • Total Entertainment Network (TEN) • Community-hosted dedicated servers • Peer-to-peer networking • Fan-operated matchmaking services • Independent server browsers

The continued existence of player communities has often depended less upon publisher operation and more upon whether communities were permitted to continue supporting themselves.

This distinction matters.

AB 1921 does not require publishers to remain responsible forever.

Rather, it recognizes that communities are often willing and capable of assuming responsibility after commercial support concludes.

PRESERVATION IS ALREADY THE INDUSTRY'S HISTORY

The concept of community-led preservation is not theoretical.

It is one of the defining characteristics of PC gaming history.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- DOOM • Duke Nukem 3D • Master of Magic • Star Control II • Descent

All remain playable, discussed, modified, maintained, and enjoyed decades after their original commercial releases.

Many have received community patches, compatibility fixes, source ports, unofficial enhancements, and preservation efforts that dramatically exceeded original support lifecycles.

The same principle extends to networked experiences.

Prominent examples include:

- Community-maintained Command & Conquer Online infrastructure • Independent RuneScape preservation projects • Minecraft community servers and custom ecosystems
- Numerous fan-operated matchmaking and multiplayer restoration projects

These communities routinely maintain systems long after publishers have moved on.

In many cases, they do so successfully for years or decades.

The practical lesson is straightforward:

A game's commercial end-of-life does not necessarily represent the end of its useful life.

AB 1921 recognizes that distinction.

THE GAMER-TO-DEVELOPER PIPELINE

An often-overlooked benefit of preservation is its contribution to technical education and workforce development.

Many technology professionals first learned practical skills through games.

Modding communities frequently expose participants to:

- Programming • Scripting • Networking • Server administration • Database management • Cybersecurity concepts • Digital art creation • 3D modeling • Audio production • Project management

These communities often function as informal technical training environments.

Numerous developers, engineers, artists, network administrators, and technology professionals trace their earliest practical experience to modifying, hosting, maintaining, or extending games.

Preservation therefore serves an educational function.

Keeping older games accessible does not merely preserve entertainment products.

It preserves learning environments that continue introducing future generations to technical disciplines.

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Speaking from personal experience, with broad knowledge of the gaming ecosystem and more than two decades working in information technology, I can very comfortably assert that community-led, independent efforts to maintain, remake, remaster, preserve,

and continue operation of titles long removed from commercial service are far from abstract concepts.

Nor are they unusually difficult from a technical perspective.

When viewed through a balanced understanding of gaming history, such efforts are revealed to be a core component of the medium itself.

They simply occur at a smaller scale and receive far less publicity than new commercial releases.

The history of gaming is filled with examples of communities solving preservation and continuity challenges independently once official support concludes.

In many cases, players have successfully maintained functionality for periods substantially longer than the original publisher ever supported the product.

The question is therefore not whether communities are capable of preserving these experiences.

History demonstrates that they are.

The question is whether legal and technical barriers should unnecessarily prevent them from doing so.

WHY AB 1921 IS A PRACTICAL FIRST STEP

AB 1921 should not be viewed as a final solution to every challenge involving digital ownership or preservation.

Rather, it establishes an important baseline expectation.

Consumers should not lose all meaningful access to a purchased product simply because official support has ended.

The legislation does not require perpetual service.

It does not require perpetual staffing.

It does not require perpetual investment.

Instead, it creates mechanisms through which ordinary use may continue after commercial support concludes.

This approach aligns consumer expectations with the realities of modern digital distribution while recognizing the longstanding role communities have played in preserving games.

In that respect, AB 1921 represents a measured, flexible, and realistic first step.

POLICY CONCLUSION

California has historically been a leader in consumer protection, technology policy, and digital innovation.

AB 1921 continues that tradition.

The proposal acknowledges a practical reality of modern gaming: communities often outlive commercial support structures.

By establishing reasonable consumer protections while preserving implementation flexibility, the bill helps ensure that purchased games do not unnecessarily disappear from practical use when publishers discontinue support.

The measure does not seek to impose perpetual obligations.

It seeks only to preserve reasonable opportunities for continued access.

For consumers, preservation advocates, educators, historians, and gaming communities alike, that objective represents a sensible and achievable public policy goal.

AB 1921 should therefore be viewed as a constructive first step toward modernizing consumer protection for the digital marketplace.