
He Wanted to Inspire the Next Generation of Inventors. Now, Tariffs Threaten to Shut Him Down.

When David Levi launched [MicroKits](#) in 2020, he wasn't just building gadgets—he was **building gateways to curiosity**.

From a small workshop in Charlottesville, Virginia, Levi designs hands-on electronics kits that make science and engineering feel less like schoolwork and more like magic. His most popular product, the MicroKits Theremin Kit, teaches kids how to build a musical instrument from scratch. By moving their hands through electric fields, they turn invisible physics into sound—no screen, no coding, just discovery.

“I wanted to make electronics feel like something *you* could touch and build with,” he said. “Something creative. Something joyful.”

Over the past few years, thousands of students, educators, and hobbyists have discovered the joy

of STEM through MicroKits. Levi even built a synthesizer that plays music when you [connect it to bananas](#) or soda cans—turning breakfast into a science experiment. And he did it all with a delicate balance: sourcing basic components from China to keep prices low while doing the assembly, customization, and quality control in-house, right here in the U.S.

But now that balance is unraveling.

In early April, President Trump announced sweeping new tariffs—dubbed the Liberation Day tariffs—that raise import taxes on a huge array of goods, including the electronic components Levi depends on. For parts made in China, the tariffs can reach as high as 150 percent.

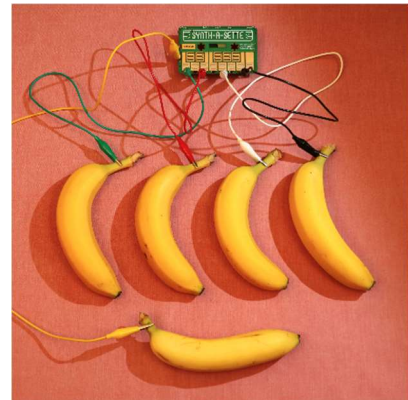
“For a business like mine, that’s a death sentence,” Levi said.

Even at 50 percent, he’d have to raise prices by at least 20 percent just to maintain his business. At rates of 100% or more, he says he can’t afford to reorder parts at all. His plans to launch a new product—the [Banan-a-Synth](#), a more advanced learning tool—are on hold. Hiring plans have been stopped, and assembly work will be frozen once parts run out.

And it’s not just the cost. The uncertainty makes running a small business nearly impossible.

“I could place an order for parts today, and by the time it arrives, the tariff might have doubled,” Levi said. “I can’t plan. I can’t budget. I can’t grow.”

The irony? Tariffs intended to promote American manufacturing might actually push Levi to move production overseas.



“I’ve spent years building tools and processes that make my products special,” he said. “I’ve customized wire-bending machines, I designed my own sticker rigs—things you just can’t outsource without sacrificing quality. But if I have to choose between moving production to the European Union or shutting down, what choice do I really have?”

Levi isn’t giving up. He’s one of several plaintiffs challenging the tariffs in court, arguing that no president should have the power to impose sweeping global taxes without Congress. The lawsuit, filed by the Liberty Justice Center, claims the Liberation Day tariffs are unconstitutional and violate basic principles of democratic government.

“This isn’t about partisan politics,” Levi said. “It’s about whether one person should be able to change the entire trade system overnight. If that’s allowed to stand, how can small businesses like mine ever feel safe?”

For now, he’s keeping the lights on, hoping the court intervenes before his inventory runs out. His workshop still hums with soldering tools and synthesizers. On the shelf, dozens of Theremin kits wait to ship out—each one a chance to spark wonder in a curious mind.

“I just want to keep making things that make people say, ‘Wow, I built that,’” he said. “I think that’s how the next generation of engineers—and inventors—gets started.”