

State Duma Looks to Fine Impolite, Neglectful Bureaucrats

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The entrance hall of the State Duma building.

Some State Duma deputies hope \$350 is the price for good manners.

A bill submitted to the Duma on Friday would levy fines of up to 10,000 rubles (\$350) on bureaucrats who ignore suggestions from people.

Currently, bureaucrats must provide information about the activities of federal, regional and municipal agencies on request — a right granted by the Constitution — and failure to respond comes with a fine of 5,000 rubes.

But people often propose solutions for various problems, only to have their letters ignored by bureaucrats, said Vladimir Pligin, head of the Duma's Constitution and State Affairs Committee, according to [Kommersant](#). The bill will make these proposals harder to ignore, he said, without elaborating.

Bureaucrats are notorious for tardiness, indifference, formalism and rudeness, all of which can be traced back to the Soviet years, when civil servants did not answer to the public and wages and promotions were not linked to performance.

A 2006 [law](#) obliges officials to reply to people's requests within 30 days. In "extreme cases," the period can be doubled.

The reply must also be "to the point," "objective" and "in-depth," and if a person reports a violation of his or her rights, the official reviewing the complaint must take action to remedy it, according to the law. It is also illegal to forward complaints about wrongdoings by officials to the officials accused of committing them.

But these rules are routinely violated, not the least because officials face no direct penalties. People can ask a court to formally order an official to reply, but the law offers no punishment for not complying, Moscow-based lawyer Sergei Dikman said by telephone.

Officials can be reprimanded or even fired for failing to fulfill their duties — which includes handling public requests — but such dismissals have rarely been reported.

People who sustain material or emotional damage over an official's inactivity have to file court complaints to get any compensation, Dikman said.

Darya Sukhikh, an expert with the St. Petersburg-based Institute for Information Freedom Development, said she hoped fines would "stimulate" bureaucrats to answer people's letters.

Dikman also called the proposed fines a "positive" initiative.

No date for a first hearing has been scheduled in the Duma.

Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov on Friday warned regional officials that they might be fired for failing to prevent wildfires, a 85 billion ruble (\$3 billion) disaster that burned an area of 2.3 million hectares, Interfax reported.

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