

Duma Gives Nod to Anti-Protest Bill

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Police detaining a man Tuesday at a demonstration outside the State Duma against raising protest fines. **Maxim Shemetov**

In a close vote, State Duma deputies on Tuesday gave tentative approval to a bill that would sharply increase fines on protesters who participate in illegal rallies, even as police detained opposition activists for protesting the legislation outside.

The bill squeaked by in a first reading, with a 226-207 vote and one abstention. With 10 fewer votes, the legislation would not have passed.

The bill, which is seen as targeting anti-Kremlin activists who have taken to the streets in recent months, would increase fines on people who take part in illegal protests from 2,000 rubles to 1 million rubles (\$65 to \$32,400), and penalties on organizers would climb from 5,000 rubles to 1.5 million rubles.

During a Duma debate on the bill, Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin held an unsanctioned protest with 50 activists outside the parliamentary building. Police detained him and five others, charged them with breaking the law by holding an illegal gathering, and released them, Interfax said.

Several prominent figures have criticized the bill, including former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, who said the measures were designed to "scare people" and force them to "reject social activism at any cost," according to comments published on the website for the Committee for Civil Activism, which Kudrin heads.

The Public Chamber also wrote in an analysis of the bill sent to Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin that the text "violates the principle of proportionate punishment."

The bill was introduced on May 11 by United Russia Deputy Alexander Sidyakin, who said he hoped it would be in force by the June 12 Russia Day holiday, when the opposition plans to hold its next mass rally.

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