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Putin Signs Law Decriminalizing Domestic Abuse

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Arman Zhenlkeyev / TASS

As expected, President Putin signed legislation on Tuesday that officially decriminalizes several forms of domestic abuse, reclassifying "violence that doesn't cause significant injury" as a misdemeanor.

According to criteria laid down by Russia's Health Ministry, the new law will decriminalize beatings within families that result in "minor harm," like "small abrasions, bruises, superficial wounds, and soft-tissue damage," though repeat offenses within a year can result in criminal prosecution.

Though the legislation was controversial in the Russian media, the bill was adopted almost unanimously in the State Duma, with 380 deputies voting in favor of the initiative and just three lawmakers voting against.

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The law's defenders say the decriminalization is necessary to avoid situations where parents might be punished more strictly for disciplining their own children than complete strangers who attack minors.

In June 2016, Putin signed legislation that decriminalized several kinds of "simple battery," but that law made an exception for violence among "close family members," introducing the concept of domestic abuse into Russia's criminal code. Social conservatives were aghast, however, complaining that mothers and fathers who use force to raise their kids still risked two years in prison "just for a spanking." In his yearly press conference in late 2016, Putin sided with Russia's conservatives, saying that parents shouldn't be sent to prison just for slapping their children.

With Putin's signature, the maximum penalty for "light" domestic violence falls from two years in prison to 15 days in jail. Perpetrators can also be fined up to 30,000 rubles ($500).

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