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Russian Federal Lawmakers to Make It Harder for Themselves to Meet With Voters

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Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP

Committee members in the State Duma have approved final amendments to legislation that would crack down on single-mandate Duma deputies' ability to hold rallies without the permission of local authorities. Lawmakers will vote on the legislation this Friday, when it's expected to pass and move on to the Federation Council.

The law would restrict legislators' right to hold impromptu public meetings, limiting them to gatherings with their actual constituents, and requiring these meetings to take place only at special locations within their districts. Rallies of any other kind would need to be approved by local officials, like ordinary public assemblies.

This law would not apply to State Duma deputies who won their seats on party tickets. The Duma consists of 450 deputies, half of whom are elected in individual contests, where lone

opposition politicians have managed in the past to slip through Russia's tightly controlled electoral system.

United Russia member Irina Belykh, the author of the legislation, explains her initiative as a response to Duma deputies she says have abused their power to meet with voters, attending political rallies outside their districts as a legal smokescreen, so organizers don't have to go through the proper channels for official permits.

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