

US court allows last month of phone spying program

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Civil liberties activists hold a rally against surveillance of US citizens at the Justice Department in Washington on January 17, 2014

An appeals court Thursday upheld the US government's systematic surveillance of American telephone calls for the duration of a Congress-approved transition period that expires next month.

Plaintiffs, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), had sought a preliminary injunction to ban the [mass surveillance](#), but a US [appeals court](#) in New York said it would not interfere with the decision passed by Congress in early June.

Congress has allowed bulk telephone data—the subject of leaks by former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden—to continue until a 180-transition period expires on November 29.

After that, the USA Freedom Act prohibits the National Security Agency (NSA) from conducting mass surveillance, although the agency will be allowed to retain records for litigation purposes.

"Congress has balanced privacy and [national security](#) by providing for a 180-day transition period, a decision that it is uniquely suited to make," wrote the court of appeals for the second circuit in New York in a 25-page decision.

"Congress's decision to do so should be respected."

ACLU attorney Alex Abdo said he was disappointed by the [decision](#) but welcomed the imminent end of the mass surveillance.

"The passage of the USA Freedom Act mean that bulk collection of Americans' call records will end in just a few weeks. All Americans should celebrate that fact," he said in a statement.

"It will now be up to the district court to address to what extent the government must purge the call records it collected unlawfully. In the meantime, the government still needs to rein in other overreaching NSA spying programs," he added.

The Freedom Act rolls back the powers that authorized the NSA to

collect vast data sweeps, which the agency said was aimed at tracking potential terrorists.

The new law halts its ability to scoop up and store metadata—telephone numbers, dates and times of calls—from millions of Americans who have no connection to terrorism.

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