

US House passes email privacy bill

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Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) listens to testimony during a House Judiciary Committee hearing, July 17, 2013 in Washington, DC

US lawmakers Wednesday approved a bill to boost privacy protection

for email and other electronic communication, closing key loopholes in digital data protection.

By a vote of 419-0, the House of Representatives approved the measure that requires court orders to access emails, text messages and data stored in the Internet "cloud" for criminal and civil investigations.

Representative Bob Goodlatte said the passage showed "broad consensus" that a 1986 law on electronic communications "is outdated and contains insufficient protections for Americans' privacy."

"The law sets forth a system to protect the privacy rights of customers and subscribers of computer network service providers and governs requests to obtain stored content, records or other information which includes stored emails, text or instant messages, documents, videos, or sound recordings stored in the cloud," the lawmaker said.

The [bill](#), which still must pass the Senate and get White House approval, had support from a broad coalition of technology firms, [civil liberties](#) groups and trade associations.

"The level of bipartisan support for this bill is a reflection of public's strong belief that the government must respect and protect privacy rights in the digital age," said Neema Singh Guliani of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"Now it's the Senate's turn to pass this important bill and strengthen it by including a requirement that the government inform people when it forces companies to turn over their information."

The bill eliminates a provision in the 1986 law which stated that emails and other communications stored more than 180 days were effectively abandoned, and that officials would not need a warrant to access them.

"Today's vote is a clear, bipartisan sign that it's time for federal law to recognize the realities of today's data storage," said Gary Shapiro, president of the Consumer Technology Association, a trade group representing more than 2,000 companies.

Chris Calabrese of the Center for Democracy and Technology said the bill modernizes [privacy protection](#).

"With the rise of cloud computing, our emails, photos and texts are stored with third parties," he said in a statement.

"In order for the law to keep up with technology and users' reasonable expectation of privacy, that information must be protected by a search warrant. That's the same constitutional standard that protects the information we store in our homes."

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