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## Senate Bill Modifies Petition Access

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The Senate yesterday modified its ban on the right of terror suspects held at Guantanamo Bay to claim their innocence in petitions to federal court in the face of withering criticism from human rights, legal and civil liberties groups.

The provision, sponsored by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), still reverses a year-old Supreme Court decision allowing the roughly 500 Guantanamo prisoners to file habeas corpus petitions challenging their designation as enemy combatants by military tribunals.

But it was amended yesterday to allow the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., to review whether the designations were based on a preponderance of evidence, and to consider whether the tribunals - which don't allow lawyers and rely heavily on secret, classified evidence - use constitutional procedures.

The modified provision was added to a defense authorization bill by an 84-14 vote, drawing more bipartisan support than the original bill, approved 49-42 last week.

The White House favors limiting prisoner rights. Supporters hope it will get President George W. Bush to sign off on parts of the defense bill he opposes, such as limits on prisoner interrogation tactics.

Critics, however, were not mollified by the changes. Among other problems, they said the Graham bill, which was never reviewed by the Senate Judiciary Committee, wouldn't give prisoners the right to put forth evidence proving their innocence and wouldn't assure they knew the evidence against them.

"The Senate's treatment of the habeas issue is a scandal," said a coalition of lawyers representing prisoners in federal court, in a release.