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By **ABIGAIL BESSLER** / CBS NEWS / August 1, 2014, 4:37 PM

Obama signs bill "unlocking" cell phones



WASHINGTON, DC - AUGUST 01: U.S. President Barack Obama signs S. 517, Unlocking Consumer Choice and Wireless Competition Act in the Oval Office at the White House August 1, 2014 in Washington, DC. S. 517 promotes consumer choice and wireless competition by permitting consumers to unlock mobile wireless devices among other things. / **CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES**

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WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama signed a bipartisan bill into law Friday that aims to make it easier for consumers to change their cell phone service providers without paying for a new phone.

The bill, known as the **Unlocking Consumer Choice and Wireless Competition Act**, reverses a decision made by the Library of Congress two years ago that said it was illegal for consumers to "unlock" their cell phones for use on other networks without their service provider's permission. That means that providers like AT&T or Verizon could legally keep a consumer's phone "locked," in which case the person would face large costs switching carriers or attempting to **link to other carriers overseas** while traveling.

Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., and Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., sponsored the act, which easily sailed through Congress last week. Mr. Obama has been a longtime supporter of the act, especially after a **White House petition** asking the president to "champion a bill that makes unlocking permanently legal" garnered over 114,000 signatures. An online response to the petition from the Administration states that the White House not only agrees with the petitioners but also supports unlocking other portable devices, like tablets.

"The bill Congress passed today is another step toward giving ordinary Americans more flexibility and choice so they can find a cell phone carrier that meets their needs and their budget," President Obama said in a statement last week.

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