

TikTok says it will fight US ban or forced sale after bill passes

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TikTok has said it will fight any ban or forced sale of the app's US operation in the courts, after the House of Representatives passed legislation targeting the viral video platform. The company's future in the US was placed in further doubt over the weekend after lawmakers in Washington passed a bill that will ban the app if TikTok's Chinese owner, ByteDance, does not sell its stake in the American business. The House passed the legislation on Saturday by a margin of 360 to 58, as part of a foreign aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. The TikTok bill will go to the Senate, where it could be voted through this week. Joe Biden has previously said he would back the legislation. TikTok's head of public policy for the Americas, Michael Beckerman, told staff in a memo after the vote that the bill was unconstitutional and TikTok would fight it in the courts. "At the stage that the bill is signed, we will move to the courts for a legal challenge," he wrote in the memo, which was first reported by the tech news website The Information. Beckerman claimed that the bill violated the first amendment of the US constitution, which protects freedom of speech. "We'll continue to fight, as this legislation is a clear violation of the first amendment rights of the 170 million Americans on TikTok," he wrote. The first amendment argument has already been deployed to TikTok's benefit in the US. Last year a district judge in Montana blocked the state's ban on the use of TikTok, saying it violated the free speech rights of users. Donald Molloy ruled the ban "oversteps state power and infringes on the constitutional rights of users". TikTok is under pressure from lawmakers in the US, and other western politicians including in the UK, over fears that its data about users can be accessed by the Chinese government. TikTok denies that Beijing authorities have demanded access to user data and says it would refuse if asked to do so. However, TikTok's critics say ByteDance would be forced under Chinese security laws to share data with security services if asked to do so. TikTok has been contacted for comment.