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## SNET's High-Speed Net Rivals Cheer As Bill Dies In Legislature

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A bill that could have limited competition for broadband Internet services in the state has been withdrawn from consideration in the General Assembly shortly before a planned public hearing.

SBC SNET, the state's leading telephone company, had backed the proposed bill, S.B. 826, claiming it was a way to promote investment in telecommunications infrastructure by limiting competitors' access to those facilities.

But other service providers, including independent Internet access companies and telephone companies, said the demise of the proposed bill was a win for consumers and small businesses who will continue to have a choice when buying high-speed Internet access.

Under the bill, SBC SNET would no longer have been required to provide its competitors with access to broadband connections at wholesale rates.

Progress on the bill was being closely watched by telecommunications companies, legislators and regulators as yet another barometer in the ongoing battle over who has access to the telephone network and under what circumstances.

John Emra, spokesman for SBC SNET, said the bill was withdrawn in part because a recent ruling by the Federal Communications Commission raised questions about how federal policy and state law would intersect.

Details of the FCC's decision still haven't been released, casting a cloud of uncertainty over the deliberations of legislators who have other pressing issues to consider.

"We thought, why don't we wait and see what the FCC order says?" Emra explained.

But Brad Mondschein, executive director of the Connecticut Internet Service Provider Association, a trade group of six independent service providers, said his members were relieved the bill was no longer pending.

The bill "would literally have put them out of business" if it had passed, he said.

AT&T Corp., which wants to compete with SBC SNET, also was pleased to learn that the proposed bill had been withdrawn.

"The bill absolutely threatened phone competition in Connecticut. It would have given SBC an iron-clad monopoly - not just on the local phone service that they have now, but also on high-speed broadband service," AT&T spokesman Jeff Roberts said.

William Vallee, a lawyer for the state's Office of Consumer Counsel, said his agency opposed the bill because it would have limited competition for broadband services, particularly for small-business customers.