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Introduction
A “legislative history” assembles the legislative documents that constitute the pre-enactment record of Congressional action on a piece of legislation. These documents include drafts of bills, hearings, committee reports, floor debates, and presidential signing statements.

Researchers use legislative histories to try to resolve questions of legislative intent, but this practice is debated. Some critics argue that a statute’s purpose is found in the plain meaning of the text itself, because that is what the legislature actually passed. However, proponents argue that legislative history can help provide insight into the legislative intent of a particular law.

Research Tip: The written report by a committee on a bill is considered one of the most important documents of the legislative history. You can begin a legislative history project by reviewing the committee report(s).

This research guide outlines the steps for identifying relevant legislative history documents for a particular piece of legislation and lists the major online, print, and microform (that is, either microfilm or microfiche) resources available and where those documents can be found.

To determine if a source listed in this guide is available through Bloomberg Law, Lexis Advance, or WestlawNext:

**Bloomberg Law:** Click the “Search & Browse” tab and select “All Legal Content,” and then either enter the name of the source into the “Select Sources” search field or drill down into the “Content Type” list.

**Lexis Advance:** Enter the name of the source in the search box at the top of the page. Select the source from the list to add it to the search or click View Table of Contents.

**WestlawNext:** Enter the name of the source in the search box at the top of the page and select the source from the list.

To obtain Bloomberg Law, Lexis, or Westlaw credentials, email eservices@law.gwu.edu and include your GWid number.
Important databases for legislative history research such as ProQuest Congressional, ProQuest Legislative Insight, and HeinOnline are accessible through the Library’s “Database Subscriptions” page: http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases.


I. Compiled Legislative Histories

Time and effort can be saved by locating a collection of legislative history documents that has already been compiled. Compiled legislative histories contain the full-text of hearings, reports, debates, and presidential statements related to a particular law.

Follow the paths below to find compiled legislative histories:

➢ ProQuest Legislative Insight:

http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases > ProQuest Legislative Insight

➢ HeinOnline:

http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases > HeinOnline > U.S. Federal Legislative History Library > U.S. Federal Legislative History Title Collection

➢ Lexis Advance:

Browse > Sources > Search for a Source > Legislative Histories

➢ WestlawNext:

Browse > All Content > Legislative History

➢ LLSDC’s Legislative Source Book: http://www.llsdc.org/sourcebook

This resource, produced by the Law Librarians’ Society of Washington D.C., provides selected compiled legislative histories with citations and links to selected full-text documents.

➢ Nancy P. Johnson, Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories

Organized by public law number, this publication provides citations to books, government documents, and articles with compiled legislative histories and listings of relevant legislative history documents.
II. Locating a Bill Number (S. _____ or H.R. _____)

When a bill is first introduced in the House or Senate, it is assigned a bill number. If it becomes law, it is assigned a public law (Pub. L.) number and then printed chronologically in the *Statutes at Large* (*Stat.*), before being codified by subject in the *United States Code* (*U.S.C.*). Thus, the public law number (Pub. L. No.), *Statutes at Large* (*Stat.*) citation, or popular name of a law will lead you to the number of the bill enacted into law. The bill number can then be used to locate legislative history documents.

A. Find the Public Law Number and the *Statutes at Large* Citation

1. **If you know the United States Code (U.S.C.) citation:**

   In the *U.S.C.*, the public law number and the *Statute at Large* citation are found in parentheses directly following the statute.

2. **If you know the popular name of the law:**

An example of a popular name is the Securities Act of 1933. If you know the popular name, you can use the “Popular Name Table” volumes of the *U.S.C*, *U.S.C.A.*, or *U.S.C.S.* to find public law numbers or the *Statute at Large* citations. The public law number and the *Statute at Large* citation are found beneath the popular name.

**Online:**


- Lexis Advance

- WestlawNext

**B. Find the Bill Number**

1. Use the public law number (e.g., Public Law 112–29) to find the text of the law in the *U.S. Statutes at Large*. Since 1904, the bill number (S. _____ or H.R. _____) appears on the first page of the law in the right margin.

2. For laws prior to 1904, consult Eugene Nabor’s *Legislative Reference Checklist: The Key to Legislative Histories from 1789-1903*, which provides a checklist of public laws for the 1st to 57th Congresses and identifies the original bill number.

**Online:** HeinOnline (*U.S. Federal Legislative History Library*)
http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases

**Print:** KF49.L43 1982 (Library location: Stack Level 3)
III. Legislative Analysis

The following resources may provide an overview and context for a law’s passage.

A. Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports

CRS provides policy and legal analysis to committees and members of both the House and Senate.

Online:
- ProQuest Congressional (PDF, 1916-): http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
- OpenCRS (PDF, selective): http://opencrs.com
- Bloomberg Law: Search & Browse > Legislative > U.S. Congress > CRS Reports

B. CQ Weekly

CQ Weekly provides detailed coverage of federal legislative activities. Tip: Search by keyword or bill number; browse by topic.

Online:
- CQ.com on Congress (1983-): http://library.gwu.edu/ > Subject Databases > Law and Government
- WestlawNext


IV. Locating Citations to Legislative History Documents

A. Legislation 1970 to date: Online:

▸ U.S. Government Printing Office’s FDsys (Federal Digital System) provides free online access to official publications from all three branches of the federal government.


The database is the online version of the “History of Bills and Resolutions” section of the Congressional Record Index. It lists legislative actions on bills that are reported in the Congressional Record. Search by public law number, bill number, title, or keywords.
Congress.gov (Library of Congress) (93rd Cong., 1973-)
https://beta.congress.gov
Lists all actions on a bill with selected links to Congressional Record debate, committee reports, and public laws. Selected documents may be available in text, PDF, or both.

HeinOnline (U.S. Congressional Documents):
http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
Provides access to the full text of the Congressional Record, Annals of Congress, Register of Debates, and Congressional Globe.

ProQuest Legislative Insight: http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
- Legislative histories (selective, PDF, 55th Cong., 1897-)
  Makes available compiled legislative histories covering laws from 1929 to the present; includes PDF versions of public laws, bills (all versions), committee reports, documents, CRS reports, committee prints, speeches in the Congressional Record, and presidential signing statements. Search by public law number, Statute at Large citation, or enacted bill number.

ProQuest Congressional: http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
- Legislative histories & documents (selective, PDF, 91st Cong., 1969-)
  Comprehensive lists of committee hearings, committee reports, committee documents, committee prints, Congressional Record debate, and presidential signing statements for public laws. The legislative histories often include related documents from prior sessions of Congress.
  Legislative histories link to abstracts and selected full-text documents. Search by keyword and restrict results by words in title or session of Congress. The CIS Number (e.g., 82-H243-99) refers to the microfiche in the CIS Microfiche Library, which contains the official versions. [Microfiche: Fiche 110, (Library location: Lower Level 1)].

- Bill Tracking (101st Cong., 1989-)
  Provides a chronology of legislative activity on a bill during a session of Congress. Links to Congressional Record debate, committee reports, and public laws. Search by keyword and restrict results to bill sponsor, bill status, and session of Congress.

Lexis Advance
- Congressional Bill Tracking Reports (101st Cong., 1989-)
  Provides a chronology of legislative activity on a bill. Links to Congressional Record debate, committee reports, and public laws.
B. Pre-1970 Legislation

Print:

► Congressional Record Index: “History of Bills and Resolutions”

The “History of Bills and Resolutions” is the last section of the Congressional Record Index volume for the session during which the bill is introduced. It lists all floor actions and committee report numbers for a bill. Committee hearings and presidential statements are not listed.

► CCH Congressional Index

Contains separate volumes for the House and Senate. “Status” sections list bills by number. Citations are provided to committee hearings, reports, and dates of floor debate. Presidential statements are not listed.

• Current ed. in RESERVE (Library location: 1st Floor): KF49.C6

• Earlier eds. (83rd Cong., 1953- ) in LEGAL REFERENCE (Library location: Lower Level 1)


U.S.C.C.A.N. consists of two separate series of volumes: “Public Laws” and “Legislative History.” The “Public Law” volumes contain the full text of enacted federal statutes. The “Legislative History” volumes contain selected committee reports and presidential signing statements. The first page of the public law cites pages in the “Legislative History” volumes where committee reports may be found (in part or full). Note: U.S.C.A.A.N. does not provide a comprehensive legislative history.

• LEGAL REFERENCE (Library location: Lower Level 1)
V. Locating Legislative History Documents

A. Bills

A bill is introduced in the House or the Senate and referred to committee(s) for consideration. A bill is numbered as H.R. ___ or S. ___ (e.g., H.R. 49 and S. 23). There can be multiple versions of a bill reflecting changes on its way to passage:

- **Introduced**: First version of legislation submitted by member of a chamber.
- **Reported**: Amended text; changes made in committee.
- **Engrossed**: Passed by one chamber; new version designated as an “Act.”
- **Conference Report**: Compromise text approved by both chambers (printed in *Congressional Record*, includes section-by-section analysis & dissenting views).
- **Enrolled**: Version presented to the President; not officially published; available online only.

**Web:**


[http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwhbsb.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwhbsb.html)

**Library of Congress. Congress.gov** (PDF, 103rd Cong., 1993- )

[https://beta.congress.gov](https://beta.congress.gov)

**FDsys** (PDF, 103rd Cong., 1993- )

[http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys)  *Browse > Congressional Bills*

Bills from current Congress updated by 6 a.m. daily.

**Commercial Databases:**

**ProQuest Legislative Insight** (PDF, 55th Cong., 1897-)


Search for bills in the “Enacted Bill” box in the “Citation Checker.”
ProQuest Congressional (101st Cong., 1989-)
http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
Search for bills in the Legislative Histories, Bills & Laws collection.

CQ.com on Congress (PDF, 104th Cong., 1994-)
http://library.gwu.edu/ > Subject Databases > Law and Government
Provides full text of all versions of bills from current and previous Congresses.

Bloomberg Law
Search & Browse > Legislative
House and Senate bills from 1993-.

Lexis Advance
Provides full text of all versions of bills from 101st Cong., 1989-.

WestlawNext
Provides full text of all versions of bills from 104th Cong., 1995-.

Print:
Congressional Record: LEGAL REFERENCE (Library location: Lower Level 1)
Selected bills, especially older Senate ones, are reprinted in the Congressional Record. Check the Congressional Record Index volumes for page citations. The texts of bills are often reprinted in hearings and committee reports.

Law Library of Congress (9th Cong., 1805-): http://www.loc.gov/law/
The Law Library maintains a set of Congressional bills.

Microform:
House and Senate Bills: Fiche 97 (96th Cong., 1979 - 106th Cong., 2000),
(Library location: Lower Level 1)
B. Hearings

Hearings on a bill may be held by committee(s). Hearings may include the bill text, written and oral statements of witnesses (e.g., agency representatives, experts, and interested parties), transcripts of question-and-answer sessions, reports, exhibits, and materials submitted for the record by witnesses, as well as correspondence and other materials submitted by interested parties.

Hearings printed by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) are the official record. Unofficial copies tend to vary, in part because witnesses may edit their remarks for the official version.

Most hearings are published from 3 months to a year after the hearing is held, but some hearings are published following a gap of two or more years. The timing of the publication depends solely on the schedule of the individual committee.

Web:

**Congressional Committee Websites**


**FDsys** (PDF, 99th Cong., 1985-)


Commercial Databases:

**ProQuest Congressional** (PDF, 18th Cong., 1817-)


Search by keyword, witness, or congressional source.

**ProQuest Legislative Insight** (PDF, 55th Cong., 1897-)


Select: “Guided Search” > Hearing

**CQ.com** (104th Cong., 1994-)

[http://library.gwu.edu/ » Subject Databases » Law and Government](http://library.gwu.edu/ » Subject Databases » Law and Government)

Find unofficial transcripts from selected hearings by selecting *Transcripts*.

**Bloomberg Law** (104th Cong., 1994-)

*Search & Browse > Legislative*

Transcripts of selected House and Senate hearings.
Lexis Advance
Federal News Service (2007-)
Provides unofficial transcripts from selected hearings.

CQ Congressional Testimony (2007-)
Provides unofficial transcripts from selected hearings.

WestlawNext
Agendas and witness lists for U.S. congressional committee hearings, transcripts of oral statements, and written statements submitted to committees of Congress. 1993-.

Print:
Recent Hearings:
U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO)
Selected hearings may be available for purchase. For more information contact the GPO: http://www.gpo.gov/contact.htm.

Congressional Committees
Transcripts of hearings are often available at the Committee’s office. Note-taking generally permitted, but photocopying generally prohibited. Additionally, the Committee that held the hearing may have copies of the final printed hearing for public distribution.
Senate Printing and Document Services provides copies of selected publications generated by the Senate:

Older Hearings:
Congressional Record Daily Digest: LEGAL REFERENCE (Library location: Lower Level 1) (1948-)
This is a separate volume of the Congressional Record.
Hearings held are noted; no full text. (Coverage varies)
Selected older hearings may be found in the Library’s collection. Check JACOB for holdings: http://jacob.law.gwu.edu. Try searching by keyword(s), title, subject, or author: e.g., “United States Congress House Committee [topic].”

GW Gelman Library (Coverage varies)
GW Gelman Library has selected final printed hearings:
http://library.gwu.edu/ > Catalog. Try using the word “hearing” as one of the search terms in an advanced search.
Library of Congress or federal agency libraries

Older hearings may be found at the Library of Congress or federal agency libraries: http://www.loc.gov/flicc/fliccmem.html.

Microform: Fiche 110 (1970- ) (Library location: Lower Level 1)

C. Committee Reports

When a committee reports a bill favorably to the House or Senate as a whole it issues a report. The written report by a committee is considered one of the most important documents of the legislative history. The committee report contains the committee’s recommendations on a particular bill, a section-by-section analysis of the bill, and dissenting views of committee members. The report may provide valuable insight into the committee’s intent behind the sections of the reported legislation. Committee reports are issued as: H.Rep. ___-___ or S.Rep. ___-___ (e.g., H.Rep. 111-101). The first number is the session of Congress, and the second number is the report number.

Web:

FDsys (PDF, 104th Cong., 1995- )
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys Browse > Congressional Reports

Congress.gov (Library of Congress) (selective PDF, 104th Cong., 1995- )
https://beta.congress.gov/

Commercial Databases:

ProQuest Congressional (selective PDF, 1st Cong., 1789- )
http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
Search by keyword, committee, or report number.

Bloomberg Law (PDF, 1995-)
Search & Browse > Legislative
House and Senate committee reports.

Lexis Advance (2000- )
House and Senate committee reports.

WestlawNext (selective coverage 1948- )
Provides committee reports as reprinted in U.S.C.A.A.N from 1948-1989. From January 1990, provides all committee reports, including reports on bills that did not become law.

Print:

Selected reports are published in the “Legislative History” volumes.

Microform:

**CIS U.S. Serial Set** and **CIS Microfiche Library** (1789- ): Fiche 109 and Fiche 110 (Library location: Lower Level 1)
Contains official versions of committee reports.

D. Debates

The *Congressional Record* contains the floor debate held in each chamber from 1873 to date. Prior to 1873, proceedings were published in the *Congressional Globe* (1833-1873), *Register of Debates* (1824-1837), and *Annals of Congress* (1789-1824). These earlier sets of congressional proceedings were summaries of floor speeches or newspaper stories that often printed lengthy accounts of the floor speeches. Over the years, coverage of floor debate expanded, and, by the mid-nineteenth century, the *Congressional Globe* contained an almost complete account of floor proceedings. In 1873, Congress established its own transcript of floor proceedings with the *Congressional Record*.

Note: There are two versions of the *Congressional Record*: a permanent bound edition and a daily edition. The page numbers from the daily edition cannot be used to find documents in the permanent edition because the pagination is different. To locate debate in permanent edition while having only page numbers from the daily, use the permanent edition’s Index, which is arranged by subject, or the History of Bills and Resolutions, which is arranged by bill and resolution numbers. Publication of the permanent bound edition is often delayed by several years after the end of each session of Congress.

Web:

**American Memory**, Library of Congress

*Annals of Congress* (PDF, 1st Cong. – 18th Cong., 1789-1824)
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwac.html

*Register of Debates* (PDF, 18th Cong. – 25th Cong., 1824-1837)
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwrd.html

*Congressional Globe* (PDF, 23rd Cong. – 42nd Cong., 1833-1873)
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwcg.html

*Congressional Record* (PDF, 43rd Cong., 1873-1875)
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwcr.html
FDsys

_Congressional Record_ (daily edition) (1994- ; PDF, 1995-)

_http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys > Congressional Record_

Provides access to the _Congressional Record_ (daily ed.)

_Congressional Record_ (permanent edition) (PDF, 1999-2001)

_http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys > Browse Collections > Congressional Record (Bound)_

Provides access to the _Congressional Record_ (permanent ed.).

_Congress.gov_, Library of Congress (104th Cong., 1995-): _Congressional Record_

Access to the daily edition (daily ed.) in text & PDF formats.

Commercial Databases:

**HeinOnline** (*U.S. Congressional Documents*) (PDF, 1st Cong., 1789-)

_http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases_

Provides access to the _Annals of Congress, Register of Debates, Congressional Globe, and Congressional Record_ (daily (since 1980) and permanent bound editions (since 1873) with indexes and daily digests and a conversion table from the daily to the bound volumes.

**ProQuest Congressional** (selective PDF, 1st Cong., 1789-)

_http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases_

Provides access to the _Annals of Congress, Register of Debates, Congressional Globe, and Congressional Record_ (permanent bound edition) (PDF, 1st Cong. – 105th Cong., 1789-1997). Also provides access to the _Congressional Record_ (daily edition) (99th Cong., 1985-).

**Bloomberg Law** (1989 -)

(Search & Browse > Legislative)

Bound and daily editions

**Lexis Advance** (99th Cong., 1985-)

Provides access to the _Congressional Record_ (daily edition).

**WestlawNext** (99th Cong., 1985-)

Provides access to the _Congressional Record_ (daily edition).

Print:

_Congressional Record_ (Permanent ed.) (76th Cong., 1939-) (with some gaps): LEGAL REFERENCE (Library location: Lower Level 1)

_Annals of Congress_ (1st Cong. – 18th Cong., 1789-1824): KF35 1834

(Library location: HISTORIC STORAGE; see Reference Desk)
Microform:

*Congressional Record* (Permanent ed.) (43rd Cong. – 94th Cong., 1873 – 1975): Fiche 105 (Library location: Lower Level 1)

*Congressional Globe* (23rd Cong. – 42nd Cong., 1833-1873): Film 105, (Library location: Lower Level 1)

*Register of Debates* (18th Cong. – 25th Cong., 1824-1837): Fiche 104C (Library location: Lower Level 1)

*Annals of Congress* (1st Cong. – 18th Cong., 1789-1824): Fiche 104B (Library location: Lower Level 1)

E. **Conference Committee Reports**

If the House and Senate bill versions differ, a conference committee may be convened to work out a compromise. A conference committee is a temporary group composed of members from the House and the Senate. The conference committee reports are regarded by some as the most persuasive evidence of congressional intent since they represent the final statement of terms agreed to by both the House and the Senate. However, conference committee reports only address the differences in the House and Senate versions of bills.

The conference report usually has two parts. The first part contains the statutory language to which the conferees have agreed and is printed in italic typeface. The second part in Roman typeface is the “Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee on Conference.” This statement contains a summary of the predecessor House and Senate provisions and, sometimes, a description of the law. It is valuable for determining the intent of the conferees. Conference reports are issued as House reports. Conference reports are reprinted in the *Congressional Record*, usually on the day filed.

To find conference committee reports, use the sources above listed under “Committee Reports.” Additionally, the “Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee on Conference” is reprinted in *U.S.C.C.A.N.* To find Conference Reports in the *Congressional Record*, use the sources listed under “Debates.”

F. **Presidential Signing Statements**

When signing or vetoing a bill, the President sometimes issues a statement about the law. For more information about signing statements, consult the guide *Finding Presidential Documents*: [http://law.gwu.libguides.com/presidentsdocs](http://law.gwu.libguides.com/presidentsdocs).
G. Public Laws / Statutes at Large

After a bill has become law, it is first printed as a slip law. These can be either public or private laws. Public laws are of general application and affect society as a whole, while private laws affect an individual or small group. Public laws are assigned a number: the first part is the session of Congress and the second part is the number of the law (e.g., Public Law 112–29). Prior to 1957, public laws were cited by chapter number (e.g., Securities Act of 1933, ch. 38, 48 Stat. 74).

The second printing of a law is in the Statutes at Large, which publishes the slip laws in bound volumes, in chronological order of passage from a session of Congress. Sample citation: 112 Stat. 3064
VI. Congressional Directories

Congressional directories provide contact information for members of Congress and their staff, and provide information about the membership and jurisdiction of House and Senate committees and subcommittees.

**House of Representative Web Site, Committee Information**
http://www.house.gov/committees

**Senate Web Site, Committee Information**
http://www.senate.gov > Committees

*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress (1774-)*
http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp
Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1996
• JK1010 .U5 1997 (Library location: Reference, 1st floor)

Congressional Directory (GPO) (official)

Congressional Yellow Book
• Leadership Directories http://www.law.gwu.libguides.com/databases
• JK1010 .C68 (Library locations: Current ed., Reference Desk, 1st floor; Earlier eds. in HISTORIC STORAGE)

Congressional Staff Directory (1974-2011)
• JK1012.C65 (Located in HISTORIC STORAGE)

VII. Sources for More Information

• KF4937 .O44 2013 (Library location: Reference, 1st floor)

• JK1021. H69 1998 (Library location: Reference, 1st floor)

• http://thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html (PDF and html)

Fenton S. Martin & Robert U. Goehlert, How to Research Congress (Congressional Quarterly, Inc. 1996)
• JK1108. M349 1996 (Library location: Stack Level 2)
Bill introduced in House or Senate

Bill is referred to Committee

A bill may be sent to multiple committees.

Committee hearings published.

Committee reports published

Floor debate recorded in the Congressional Record

Conference Committee convened, if needed, after each chamber passes bill

Vote in Committee to report bill to the floor

Selected introductory remarks recorded in the Congressional Record. Bill text may also be recorded.

Floor Debate

Floor Vote

Conference committee report published.

President signs or vetoes bill after both chambers pass same version of bill

Floor votes are recorded in the Congressional Record.

Presidential statements regarding bills are published in the Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents.

Bill becomes law if President signs bill or veto is overridden

Slip law is published

Laws bound chronologically by public law number in the Statutes at Large

Laws codified by subject in the United States Code