

Federal Legislative History

A. The purpose of legislative history research:

1. To monitor the progress of pending legislation.
2. To determine the legislative intent behind an enacted statute in order to resolve ambiguities created by the words of the statute.

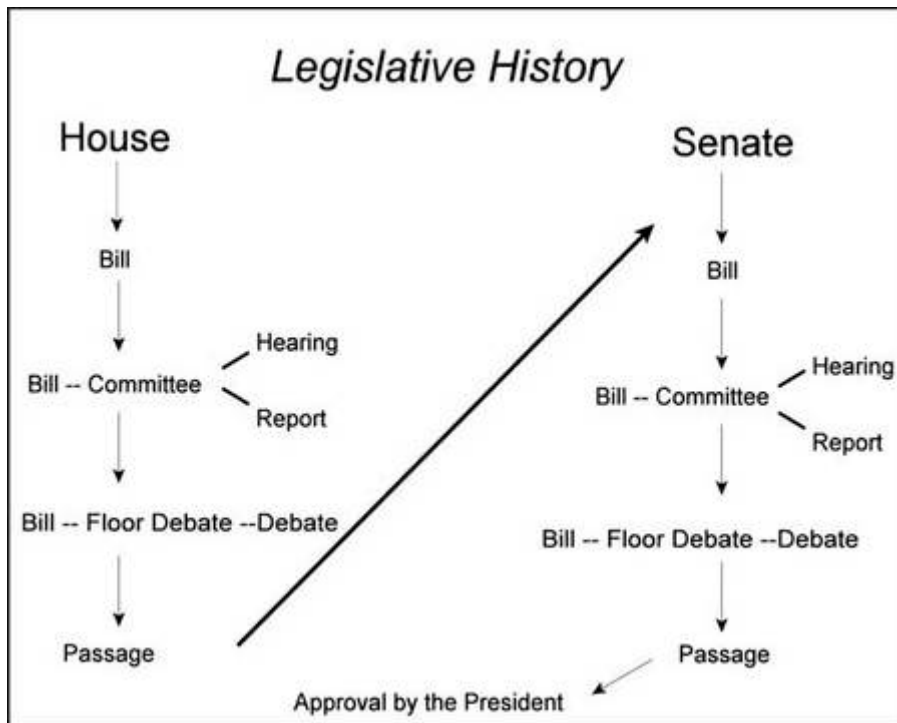
B. The two-step process of legislative history research to find legislative intent:

1. Identify the documents produced as the proposed legislation made its way through the legislative process.
2. Examine these documents for statements of legislators and other noteworthy individuals who addressed this legislation. Their statements may shed light on the meaning and purpose of an enacted law's provisions.

C. Identifying the types of documents:

There are four main types of legislative history documents produced by Congress during the legislative process: bills, hearings, reports and debates.

D. This diagram of the legislative process shows where each type of document is produced in the legislative process.



E. What each document tells you about legislative intent:

- **Bills.** As a bill is amended during the legislative process, it is reprinted. Each printing contains new language. Progressive additions, deletions and alternatives in language are direct evidence of deliberate thinking. Remember also to examine the differences between companion bills (other bills on the same subject).
- **Hearings.** These are transcripts of testimony offered by invited experts on the subject of the proposed legislation. Hearings suggest what information the legislature had when it enacted the statute.
- **Reports.** These are the most useful of all the legislative documents in proving intent. A report could include a detailed analysis of each section of a bill; an explanation of the purpose of any committee amendments; an indication of what the bill is designed to accomplish and how it changes existing law; and the committee's explanation of its recommendation for action on the bill.
- **Debates.** These are statements about proposed legislation made by legislators on the floors of the Senate and House. Statements for or against passage of a bill can indicate legislators' interpretations of the bill's language.

F. Legislative history research entails identifying relevant bills, hearings, reports, and debates and then examining them to determine legislative intent. The following sources can help you in this endeavor:

Print Sources

1. Statutes at Large (1789-) (Main Reading Room KF 50 .U5). The official source of federal session laws, *Statutes at Large* is a finding tool for legislative history documents (1963-). A legislative history summary appears after the text of each law enacted (1975-). This summary includes citations to House, Senate, and Conference reports. It also lists the law's dates of passage and consideration in each house as well as references to presidential statements. However, the summaries do not provide references to exact *Congressional Record* pages, or to hearings and other relevant documents. From 1963 to 1974, legislative history information appeared at the end of each *Statutes at Large* volume in a table called "Guide to Legislative History."

2. U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN) (1941-) (Main Reading Room KF 48 .W45). *USCCAN* is an unofficial session law source for federal statutes. It is also the legislative service for *USCA*. *USCCAN* volumes are divided by Congressional session; volumes within a session are further divided into "laws" and "legislative history."

The legislative history volumes contain edited versions of selected committee reports (and occasionally other documents as well). They provide citations to all of the committee reports, the *Congressional Record*, and presidential signing statements (1986-). Both laws and legislative histories in *USCCAN* are arranged by public law number.

USCCAN provides a quick legislative history overview, but for a more complete legislative history, you will need to use other sources.

3. CCH Congressional Index (1965-) (Main Reading Room KF 49 .C6). This publication is solely a finding tool. It does not provide the text of Congressional documents.

It is a very good source for monitoring the status of proposed legislation or reconstructing the chronological history of an enacted law. It is published weekly while Congress is in session, in a two-volume looseleaf format, with one volume for the House and another for the Senate. It contains important basic information about Congressional activity with indexes of all public general bills by subject and by sponsor; digests of each bill; a status table of actions taken on bills and resolutions; a table of companion bills and much more.

Print Sources with Accompanying Microfiche

1. Congressional Information Service (CIS) (1970-) (2nd Floor Microform Area Cabinets 1-5). In addition to indexing hearings, reports, and other legislative documents, this service provides both abstracts and full-text microfiche reproductions of these documents.

Two permanent volumes were produced, an Index volume and an Abstracts volume (1970-1983). The back of the Abstracts volume contained comprehensive legislative histories of public laws. Since 1984, these legislative histories have been published in a third annual volume entitled Legislative Histories. This third volume includes references to bills, hearings, committee reports, debates and other House, Senate and presidential documents. This is the most complete hardcopy source for legislative history information.

2. Congressional Bills, Resolutions, and Amendments (1988-2008) (Lower Level Microform Area Cabinets 5 & 6). **Cumulative Finding Aid for Congressional Bills and Resolutions** (Lower level, Microform Area KF16 .U55). This print finding aid published by the Government Printing Office enables one to locate Congressional bills and resolutions in the accompanying microfiche set.

3. U.S. Congressional Serial Set (1789-). The *Serial Set* contains the full text of all Congressional committee reports and House and Senate Documents. House and Senate Documents include executive communications to Congress, special reports to Congress, and special studies. As a general rule, the *Serial Set* does not contain hearings.

Serial Set publications (1789-1969) are available in microfiche in Kresge Library (2nd floor, Microform area, MF Cabinet 7-8). Indexing is available with the print *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index* (Reserve KF 12 .U52).

Many documents (1969-) normally published in the *Serial Set* can be found in the Congressional Information Service (CIS) microfiche set mentioned above.

The *Serial Set* is also available electronically in [ProQuest Congressional](#) (1789-) and [U.S. Congressional Serial Set](#) (1817-1994) by Readex.

Electronic Resources—Free on the Internet

1. [Congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)

Congress.gov is the official website for federal legislative information. It is maintained by the Library of Congress (LOC) using data from the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Office of the Secretary of the Senate, the Government Publishing Office, Congressional Budget Office, and the LOC's Congressional Research Service.

Bills

Click the **Legislation** link at the top or bottom of the homepage for full text versions of all published bills (1973-).

Hearings

Under **House Links** at the foot of the homepage select the **Hearings (Video)** link for live and archived House hearings videos and transcripts (2012-).

Reports

Under **Site Content** at the bottom of the homepage select **Committee Reports** for the full text of most published House and Senate committee reports (including conference reports) (1995-).

Debates

Click the **Congressional Record** link at the top or bottom of the homepage. Contains the full text of the daily edition of the *Congressional Record* (1995-). The *Congressional Record* is the edited daily transcript of what is said on the floors of the Senate and House. The *Congressional Record Index* is also available (1995-).

Public Laws

Under **Bill Searches and Lists** at the top of the homepage select **Public Laws** (1973-). After a bill is approved by Congress and signed by the President (or his veto is overridden) it becomes a public law.

United States Code

Under **Bill Searches and Lists** at the top of the homepage select **U.S. Code**. Redirects to the Office of Law Revision Counsel [website](http://www.legis.la.gov). (1994-).

The Legislative Process

Under **Site Content** at the foot of the homepage select **Legislative Process** for videos (with transcripts) describing the steps involved in the federal law-making process.

2. govinfo.gov

Govinfo.gov is a service of the [United States Government Publishing Office](http://www.gpo.gov) (GPO), which is a Federal agency in the legislative branch. It provides free public access to official publications from all three branches of the Federal Government. Locate documents under **A-Z Browse documents by alphabetical order**.

Bills

All published versions of bills (1993-) are available in full text in **Congressional Bills. History of Bills, 1983 to Present** provides a bill summary, the names of the bill's sponsors and cosponsors, and a chronological list of actions on the bill. The chronology identifies the related legislative documents that were produced as each bill moved through Congress. The file is updated daily.

Hearings

Selected hearing transcripts (1957-) are available in **Congressional Hearings**.

Reports

Congressional Reports provides the full text of House and Senate reports (1995-). Additional documents from previous congresses are also available. **Congressional Reports**, along with **Congressional Documents** (1975-), are part of the [U.S. Congressional Serial Set](http://www.gpo.gov), commonly referred to as the *Serial Set*.

Debates

The edited transcripts of Congressional proceedings and debates (1994-) are available in **Congressional Record (Daily)** (1994-) and **Congressional Record (Bound)** (1873 to 2001, 2003 to 2015). **Congressional Record Index** (1983-) is also available.

Public Laws (and Private Laws)

The final laws resulting from bills approved by Congress and signed by the President (1995-) are contained in **Public and Private Laws**. The Office of the Federal Register (OFR) under the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) prepares and publishes these documents, so the database is updated when publication is authorized by the OFR.

United States Code

Every six years, public laws still in effect and of a general and permanent nature are arranged by subject and incorporated into the *United States Code*. Thereafter, any reference to the statute should include the U.S.C. citation. The text of *United States Code* editions (1994-) is available in **United States Code**.

Electronic Resources—Subscription Services

1. [Bloomberg Law](#)

Bill Text

Browse > Laws & Regulations > Legislative Resources. Under **Legislative Materials** select **U.S. House & Senate Bills**: PDF versions available (1993-).

Hearings

Browse > Laws & Regulations > Legislative Resources. Under **Legislative Materials** select **Official U.S. House and Senate Committee Transcripts**: selected hearings. Senate (2015-); House (2016-).

Reports

Browse > Laws & Regulations > Legislative Resources. Under **Legislative Materials** select **Official U.S. House & Senate Committee Reports**: PDF versions (1995-).

Debates

Browse > Laws & Regulations > Legislative Resources. Under **Legislative Materials** select **Congressional Record: Historical Congressional Record (1933-1988)** (bound edition) or **Congressional Record (1989- present)** (daily edition): PDF versions.

Public laws

Browse > Laws & Regulations > Legislative Resources. Under **Codes & Statutes** select **U.S. Public Laws & Statutes at Large**: (1778-).

United States Code

Browse > Laws & Regulations > Legislative Resources. Under **Codes & Statutes** select **Browse U.S. Code** (current) or **Historical U.S. Code Versions** (1926-).

2. HeinOnline

Hearings

U.S. Congressional Documents > Congressional Hearings: selected hearings (1887-2014).

Reports

U.S. Congressional Serial Set > Congressional Reports: (2015-2019).

Debates

U.S. Congressional Documents > Congressional Record: (1873-2015) and **Congressional Record Daily:** (1980-2019). The *Congressional Record's* predecessors, *Annals of the Congress of the United States* (1789-1824), *Register of Debates* (1824-1837), and *Congressional Globe* (1833-1873) are also included.

Public Laws (and Private Laws)

U.S. Statutes at Large: contains *Statutes at Large* volumes (1789-2012). See **U.S. Statutes at Large > Public and Private Laws of the United States** for those passed from 2011-2019 and not yet published in *Statutes at Large*.

United States Code

U.S. Code: all editions of the *United States Code* (1925-2012).

Compiled Legislative Histories

U.S. Federal Legislative History Library > U.S. Federal Legislative History Title Collection. A collection of full-text legislative histories on selected “important and historically significant legislation.” Also includes Nancy Johnson's work, *Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories*, as a finding aid.

3. Lexis Advance

Bills

Statutes & Legislation > Bill Text: full text of all published versions of bills (1989-).
Statutes & Legislation > Bill Tracking: follow bills from introduction through the legislative process (1989-).

Hearings

Statutes & Legislation > Legislative Histories > Congressional Hearings (1824-current): documents in this source are available in PDF only.

Reports

Statutes & Legislation > Legislative Histories > Committee Reports: (1981-1982; 1989-) (selected coverage from 1981-1982 and 1989-1992).

Debates

Statutes & Legislation > Congressional Record: (1789-).

Public laws

Statutes & Legislation > Public Laws/ALS > USCS –Public laws: (1988-) and **United States Statutes at Large:** (1776-).

[4. ProQuest Congressional](#)

A Web-based alternative to the hardcopy Index, Abstracts, and Legislative Histories volumes of Congressional Information Service (CIS). Searchable, PDF, full-text versions of bills (1789-); selected hearing transcripts (1824-); reports (1817-); debates (*Congressional Record* Permanent Edition) (1873-1997) and (*Congressional Record* Daily Edition) (1985-); other legislative documents (1817-); and public laws (1988-) are available.

The **Legislative Histories** in [ProQuest Congressional](#) cite the relevant enacted bill, related bills, hearings, reports, and debates for each public law and often provide links to the full-text documents (although not all are available in PDF). Full legislative histories of all public laws (1999-); full legislative histories of major public laws (1984-1998); abbreviated legislative histories of major public laws (1969-1983).

[5. ProQuest Legislative Insight](#)

Compiled federal legislative histories containing digital full-text versions of bills, *Congressional Record* debates, committee hearings, and reports for **enacted** U.S. public Laws (1789-). Committee prints, CRS reports, and miscellaneous Congressional publications are provided as background material. Presidential signing statements are also included. Provides links to regulatory history ([Regulatory Insight](#)) and Supreme Court history ([Supreme Court Insight](#)).

6. [Westlaw](#)

Bills

Proposed and Enacted Legislation > Federal > Congressional Bills: contains the text of all versions of Congressional bills introduced in the current Congress.

Proposed and Enacted Legislation. Under **Tools & Resources** select **Historical Proposed Legislation (Bills) > Historical Federal Bills:** bills from earlier Congresses (1995-2016) are available in historical databases such as **104th Congress (1995-1996).**

Proposed and Enacted Legislation. Under **Tools & Resources** select **Bill Tracking > U.S Congress:** summaries and status information on federal legislation introduced in the current Congress.

Proposed and Enacted Legislation. Under **Tools & Resources** select **Bill Tracking > Bill Tracking: Historical > U.S. Congress:** summaries and status information on federal bills from earlier legislative sessions (2005-).

Hearings

Legislative History > U.S. Congressional Testimony: Witness lists and both written and oral statements made in committee hearings (January 1993-). Full coverage (1996-) and selected coverage (1993-1996). Updated daily while Congress is in session.

Reports

Legislative History > U.S. Code Congressional & Administrative News > Congressional Committee Reports: edited texts of committee reports (1948-1989). The information is the same as that found in *U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN)*—except *USCCAN* only has reports for bills that have become law. Contains full-text versions of all committee reports (1990-) regardless of whether or not a bill became a law. Also includes legislative history of Securities Laws (1933-).

Debates

Legislative History > Congressional Record: the *Congressional Record* (1985-). Cites to the daily editions of the *Congressional Record*.

Public laws

Proposed and Enacted Legislation > Federal > U.S. Public Laws: public laws enacted during the current Congress.

Proposed and Enacted Legislation > Federal. Under **Tools & Resources** select **Historical Enacted Legislation (Session Laws) > U.S. Public Laws-Historical:** public laws passed in prior years (1973-2016).

United States Code

Statutes & Court Rules > United States Code Annotated (USCA). Retrieve a code section and click its **History Tab** for **Legislative History Materials**.

Compiled Legislative Histories

Legislative History > U.S. GAO Federal Legislative Histories: Legislative histories for most public laws enacted (1921-1995).

Legislative History. Under **Tools & Resources** select **Arnold & Porter Legislative Histories:** selected, compiled full-text legislative histories.

Selected Sources for Federal Legislative History Research

PRINT SOURCES				
CCH Congressional Index (1965–) (Main Reading Room KF49.C6)				
Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Citations	Citations	Citations	Citations	Citations
U.S. Statutes at Large (1789–2011) (available in HeinOnline)				
Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Citations		Citations	Citations	Full-text PDF
U.S.C.C.A.N. (1941–2012) (Main Reading Room KF48.W45)				
Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Citations		Citations Edited Text Occasionally Full Text	Citations	Full-text PDF

PRINT SOURCES WITH ACCOMPANYING MICROFICHE				
Congressional Bills, Resolutions, and Amendments (1988–2011) (Lower Level Microform Area Cabinets 5-6)				
Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Full-text PDF				
Congressional Information Service (CIS) (1970–) (Main Reading Room Microform Area Cabinets 1-5) Abstracts volume (1970–83); Legislative Histories volume (1984–)				
Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Citations	Full Text	Full Text	Citations	Full Text
U.S. Congressional Serial Set (1789–) (available in ProQuest Congressional and U.S. Congressional Serial Set (Readex))				
Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
	Occasionally Full Text (some 19 th century hearings)	Full-text PDF		

ELECTRONIC SOURCES—FREE GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

[Congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Bills, Resolutions (1973–)	Video House Committees (2012–)	Committee Reports (1995–)	Congressional Record (1995–)	Public Laws (1973–) United State Code (1994–)

[govinfo](http://www.govinfo.gov)

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Citations History of Bills (1983–) Congressional Bills (1993–)	Congressional Hearings (selected, 1957–)	Congressional Reports (1995–)	Congressional Record Index (1983–) Congressional Record (1994–)	Public and Private Laws (1995–) United States Code (1994–)

ELECTRONIC SOURCES—SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

[Bloomberg Law](http://www.bloomberglaw.com)

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
U.S. House & Senate Bills (1993–)	Official U.S. House and Senate Committee Transcripts (1995–)	Official U.S. House & Senate Committee Reports (1995–)	Congressional Record (1989–) Congressional Record: Historical Congressional Record (1933-1988)	U.S. Public Laws & Statutes at Large (1778–) Browse U.S. Code (current) Historical U.S. Code Versions (1926–)

ELECTRONIC SOURCES—SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES continued

[HeinOnline](#)

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
	Congressional Hearings selected hearings (1887-2014).	Congressional Reports (2015-2019)	Congressional Record (1873–2015) Congressional Daily Record (1980–)	U.S. Statutes at Large (1789–2012) United States Code (1925–2012) U.S. Federal Legislative History Library (legislative histories for selected statutes)

ELECTRONIC SOURCES—SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES continued

[Lexis Advance](#)

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Congressional Full Text Bills -- Current Congress	Congressional Hearings (1824–)	Committee Reports (1989–)	Congressional Record (1985–)	USCS-Public Laws (1988–)
Congressional Full Text Bills-archive (1989–)			Congressional Record Retro (1873–1997)	United States Statutes at Large (1776-)
Bill Tracking Report-Current Congress				
Bill Tracking Report-archive (1989–)				

ELECTRONIC SOURCES—SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES continued

ProQuest Congressional

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Bills & Laws (1789–)	Hearings (1824–)	House & Senate Reports (1817–)	Congressional Record Bound Edition (1873–2001) Congressional Record Daily Edition (1985–)	Bills & laws (1988–)

ProQuest Legislative Insight (1789–) (only for enacted legislation)

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Full-text PDF	Full-text PDF	Full-text PDF	Full-text PDF	Full-text PDF

ELECTRONIC SOURCES—SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES continued

Westlaw

Bill	Hearing	Report	Debate	Statute
Congressional Bills (current Congress)	U.S. Congressional Testimony	Congressional Committee Reports	Congressional Record (1985–)	U.S. Public Laws (2017–)
Historical Proposed Legislation (Bills) (1995–)	selected coverage (1993–1996)	edited texts of selected committee reports (1948–1989)		U.S. Public Laws- Historical (1973–2016)
Bill Tracking (current Congress)	full coverage (1996–)	all committee reports (1990–)		United States Code Annotated (under History tab click Legislative History Materials)
Bill Tracking Historical (2005–)				Compiled Legislative Histories: U.S. GAO Federal Legislative Histories (1921–1995); Arnold & Porter Legislative Histories