The Federal legislative process is well-documented, and it may be useful to search for legislative history documents explaining why a particular bill was introduced or law was passed. If you are fortunate, you may find that someone has already compiled a legislative history on the law you are researching. See the section below on finding a previously compiled legislative history.

You will find that many collections of legislative history documents are organized by public law number, so your first step may be to locate the relevant public law number.

**How to Find a Public Law Number**

Legislative history compilations and the documents themselves are often organized by public law number, bill number, or title of the act.

A first step is to locate the public law number. The first public law to pass a Congress is designated number 1. Pub. L. No. 105-1 would be the first bill introduced in the 105th Congress. Each subsequent public law is numbered sequentially throughout the two-year term of a Congress.

- There are numerous ways to find public law numbers. One easy way is to look at the legislative history notes that follow the text of an Act in an annotated code such as *US Code Annotated (USCA)* [LAW REFERENCE 2nd floor KF 62.5 .W45 or Westlaw] or *US Code Service (USCS)* [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 62.5 .L49 or LexisNexis]. The notes in these codes should contain the date of passage, the public law number, and the *Statutes at Large* citation. (LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 50 .US545 or HeinOnline).

- If you only know the subject of an act, use the subject indexes in USCA or USCS to find the public law number.

- If you know the name of an act, use the popular names tables in USCA or USCS or the *Shepard’s Acts and Cases by Popular Name* volumes [LAW REFERENCE 2nd floor KF 90 .S538 2010] to find the public law number.

- If you need to find the bill number to use one of these compilations, and you know the public law number, you can find the bill number in the *Statutes at Large*. To obtain the bill numbers for early Congresses (1st to 57th, 1789 - 1903), consult the Legislative Reference Checklist [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 49 .L43 1982 or HeinOnline]. Once in HeinOnline, just click on the U.S. Federal Legislative History link on the left, and then the Legislative Reference Checklist in the "Browse" column on the left.
How to Locate a Compiled Legislative History

The best way to start federal legislative history research is to determine whether someone else has already compiled and published a legislative history. The sources below may guide you to publications that include full text documents, or to a list of all available documents about the law. To locate a compiled legislative history, check the following sources:

PRINT RESOURCES

To quickly locate the most important history documents for legislative acts from 1943 through the current Congress, you can find the law and selected history documents in US Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN) [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 48 .U552 or Westlaw].

Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories, by Nancy P. Johnson [LAW REFERENCE 2nd floor KF 42 .S6]
Also available through HeinOnline, with links to selected full-text documents. From the home page, click on U.S. Federal Legislative History Library, then click on Sources of Compiled Legislative History Database

Federal Legislative Histories: An Annotated Bibliography and Index to Officially Published Sources, by Bernard Reams [LAW REFERENCE 2nd floor KF 42.2 1994]

CIS Annual 1970 - present. [LAW MICROFORMS 1st floor KF 49 .C62]
This print index includes complete legislative histories with references to the full-text documents available in the Library’s CIS microfiche collection. Please see a Reference Librarian if you need help using the index. From the 91st to 98th Congresses (1970 - 1983) legislative histories are found at the end of the Abstracts volume. Beginning in 1984, an Annual Legislative History volume lists histories by public law number. Each history contains an abstract of the public law and full bibliographic citations to relevant documents.

The William A. Wise Law Library also has legislative histories in print and on microfiche. Use the Wise Law Library Online Library Catalog at http://lawpac.colorado.edu/search~S0. [Hint: Use the "keywords" search option to search for keywords from the title of the act (example: searching "american disabilities legislative" will bring up the call number for a book containing the full text of all the legislative history documents relating to the Americans with Disabilities Act.)]

ONLINE RESOURCES

LexisNexis has CIS Legislative Histories from 1970 through current (abstracted documents only) in the file LEGIS;CISLH. Selectively compiled legislative histories are also available and can be found by browsing the online directory in "Federal Legal - US" and then clicking on "Legislative Histories & Materials."

Westlaw has access to legislative history materials in a number of formats. You can search US GAO Federal Legislative Histories (FED-LH), which includes comprehensive legislative histories for most U.S. Public Laws enacted from 1915 to 1995 (rolling release), as compiled by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, including the text of laws, bills, committee reports, Congressional Record documents, transcripts of hearings, and other documents in PDF format. If you are looking at a statute, there is a link on the left to related hearings and reports. Westlaw also offers the Arnold & Porter Collection of legislative histories, located by browsing the online directory in "US Federal Materials" and clicking on "Arnold & Porter Collection - Legislative Histories."
LexisNexis Congressional [accessible through the Wise Law Library Research Resources page] offers compiled legislative histories for all federal acts since the 91st Congress (1969-1970), with links to the full-text of many of the legislative documents. This service also offers indexing for pre-1970 legislative documents.

HeinOnline [accessible through the Wise Law Library Research Resources page] has selected legislative histories available in a full-text, fully searchable format. Click on the U.S. Federal Legislative History Library.

The Department of Commerce Law Library has a limited number of legislative histories available online, from the Antidumping Law of 1921 to the 1976 Copyright Act Revisions. For a full listing of the histories, and links to the online documents, go to the Law Librarian's Society of Washington D.C.'s listing of histories, by popular name and by public law number. You will be prompted to enter a PIN number, and may choose any number you want to use.

US Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN) is also available on Westlaw (database: LH). From 1948-1989, the database is the same as the print version of USCCAN. From 1990, the database contains the full text of all congressional committee reports, including reports on bills that did not become law.

INDEXES ONLINE
ProQuest Congressional [accessible through the Wise Law Library Research Resources page]. This subscription Internet database indexes the American State Papers and the 15th to current Congresses (1789 to current). Use the "Advanced Search" tab, which allows you to limit your search to the type of document you want, the subject, and, if known, the date or Congress. This index will help you find citations to reports, hearings, committee prints, and House and Senate documents, as well as the Congressional Record (1985 - current) and bills (1969 - current).

INDEXES IN PRINT
The following indexes are located near the Microforms Collection on the 1st Floor.

Indexes for Finding Congressional Reports
- Reports before 1970 are indexed in the CIS Serial Set Index, [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 49 .C616]. The reports are indexed by subject and keyword, and each entry contains a brief description of the report. This index provides both the report number from the Serial Set and the CIS number, to help you find the full-text of each report.

Indexes for Finding Hearings
- Hearings after 1970 are indexed in the CIS Annual [LAW MICROFORMS 1st floor KF 49 .C62] by subject, title, and bill number.
- Abstracts for each hearing are listed in the "Reference Bibliography"
section. These abstracts include a detailed description of the hearing and a CIS number, which is needed to locate the full-text of the hearing in the Library’s microforms collection.

These hearings are indexed by subject, name, organization, and bill number. Abstracts for each hearing include a detailed description of the hearing and the CIS number needed to locate the full-text of the hearing in the Library’s microforms collection.

These hearings are indexed by subject, name, organization, and bill number. Abstracts for each hearing include a detailed description of the hearing and the CIS number needed to locate the full-text of the hearing in the Library’s microforms collection.

Indexes for Finding Committee Prints

- Committee Prints from 1979 to current (91st Congress to current) are indexed in the CIS Annual.

Committee Prints are indexed by subject, title, and bill number. If you have the public law number, the easiest way to locate a committee print is to check the legislative history section at the end of CIS Annual.

How to Locate the Relevant Legislative Documents Once You have Found the Citation

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee reports are usually considered to be the most important documents of a legislative history. Reports are issued by House, Senate, and Joint Conference Committees. They often contain an analysis of the intent of the proposed legislation and the committee’s rationale for its recommendations.

The Committee Reports are issued as part of the Serial Set, which contains the sequentially numbered Senate and House Documents and Senate and House Reports for each session of Congress. [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 49 .C616]

Committee Reports Available Online

Proquest Congressional [accessible through the Wise Law Library Research Resources page]. This subscription Internet database provides full-text of committee reports from 1989 to the present.

LexisNexis: The Committee Reports file (LEGIS;CMTRPT) contains full-text of House and Senate committee reports from 1990 to present.

Westlaw: From 1948 through 1989, the LH database contains only the Congressional Committee Reports reprinted in the United States Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN) [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 48 .U552 or Westlaw].

From 1990 to date, this database contains all congressional committee reports, including reports on bills that did not become law.

Thomas (http://thomas.loc.gov) includes committee reports from the 104th Congress (1995) to present.

The Library of Congress's American Memory Project has reports from 1789 to 1838 online as part of the American State Papers, and from 1833 to 1917 has selected reports online as part of the U.S. Serial Set.

FDsys has access through its new digital document platform to reports from the 104th Congress (1995) to present.

Committee Reports Available in Print

Committee reports are available in paper format from the 27th Congress (1833) to date, as part of the Serial Set.

From 1789 to 1838, reports are part of the American State Papers [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 11 .A48 1998r]

US Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN), contains selected full-text House and Senate reports from the 78th Congress (1943) to date. The reports are included in the "Legislative History" volumes. This set also includes partial reprints of some reports and citation information for others.

Hint: If you've looked everywhere, and can't find a report, put the information into Google Book Search.

Committee Reports Available on Microfiche

The most complete source of committee reports available at the Wise Law Library is the CIS microfiche set. House, Senate, and Joint Conference Committee Reports from the 1st Congress forward are available on microfiche as part of this set. To locate reports in this set, you will need the American State Papers or Serial Set citation and/or the CIS number. Please contact a Reference Librarian if you need help.

BILLS & AMENDMENTS

The first bill in the House of Representatives in each Congress is identified as H.R. 1, and each subsequent House bill is numbered sequentially. Likewise, the first bill introduced in the Senate is identified as S. 1, and each subsequent Senate bill is numbered sequentially.

If you know the public law number, you can find the bill number in the Statutes at Large. To obtain the bill numbers for early Congresses (1st to 57th, 1789 - 1903), consult Legislative Reference Checklist [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 49 .L43 1982 or HeinOnline].

Bills Online

Proquest Congressional indexes bills from the 1st Congress to the most recent Congress, and provides full-text and status of bills from the 101st Congress (1989) to present.

Thomas at http://thomas.loc.gov includes the full-text of bills from the 101st Congress (1989) to present.

FDSys has access through its new digital document platform to bills from the 103rd Congress (1993) to present.

GPO Access at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/legislative.html includes the full-text of bills from the 103rd Congress (1993) to present.

LexisNexis - Offers full-text of bills introduced in the House and Senate since the 101st Congress, and tracking of congressional bills for the same time period. From the main search page, select "Legislation & Politics," select the subcategory "US Congress," then select the subcategory "Full Text of Bills - Historical."

Westlaw - Offers full-text of bills from the 104th Congress to date in the following databases: CONG-BILLTXT (for the 109th Congress), CONG-BILLTXT108, CONG-BILLTXT107, CONG-BILLTXT106, CONG-BILLTXT105, and CONG-BILLTXT104. Bill Tracking for the current session is available in the database US-BILLTRK and for older bills (from 1991) in BILLTRK-OLD. (Note: BILLTRK-OLD combines federal bills with state bills).

The Library of Congress hosts House Bills & Resolutions from the 6th to the 42nd Congress (1799 to 1872), Senate Bills & Resolutions (from the 16th to 42nd Congress (1819 to 1872), and Senate Joint Resolutions (from the 18th to the 42nd Congresses (1823-1872).
COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Hearings are held by standing and special committees of the House and Senate about particular issues of concern or about proposed legislation. In legislative history research, the hearings about proposed legislation are typically the most useful, because they often provide information about the purpose or expected effect of a particular piece of legislation.

Hearings are not held on all proposed legislation and that not all hearings are published. In addition, hearings relevant to a particular piece of legislation may have been held and published during a session of Congress prior to the one in which the law was eventually enacted.

Hearings Online

The resources listed below are the best sites for locating hearings online:

Westlaw offers selected recent congressional testimony in the databases listed below:

- UTESTIMONY contains selected transcripts of oral or written statements from US congressional committee hearings from 1993 - 1995; full coverage begins in 1996.
- USPOLTRANS contains transcripts of testimony from selected US congressional committee hearings since 1994.
- CONGTMY contains congressional testimony, transcripts, and official documents from the committees of the Congress from 1995 to current, as provided by NewsRoom.

Proquest Congressional (accessible through the Wise Law Library Research Resources page) - This subscription Internet database includes the full-text for only a limited number of recent hearings. Lexis offers selected recent hearings in the files listed below:

- Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Hearings Summaries (LEGIS;HEARNG): contains recent transcripts of congressional hearings, individual written testimony of witnesses and detailed reports of select committee hearings.
- Federal News Service (LEGIS;FEDNEW): includes a few congressional hearings since 1988 that relate to a major news story.

FDSys has access through its new digital document platform to hearings from the 105th Congress (1997) to present.

GPO Access http://www.gpoaccess.gov/chearings/index.html - A limited number of hearings from the 105th Congress (1997) through the most recent Congress are available at GPO Access.

House Committee Hearings [http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/committee.tab.action] - Selected recent house hearings are organized by committee and available at this site.

Hearings on Microfiche

All of the hearings listed in the CIS indexes mentioned above, are available on microfiche. To locate a hearing, you need the CIS year and the CIS number assigned to each hearing.

- House & Senate hearings from 1970-
current are in the library’s Microforms Collection on the 1st Floor.

- House & Senate hearings from 1869-1970 are available at Norlin.

**COMMITTEE PRINTS / HOUSE & SENATE DOCUMENTS**

A congressional committee may request a special study in a specific subject area relating to proposed legislation, called a committee print. Committee prints often provide valuable information such as statistical analyses or historical background research.

House and Senate Documents are a diverse group of non-congressional materials ordered printed by Congress. These documents may include annual or special reports to Congress, special studies or background information, and Senate treaty documents.

**Committee Prints / House & Senate Documents Online**

Proquest Congressional (available through the Wise Law Library’s Research Resources page): This database indexes committee prints from the 21st Congress (1830) to the most recent Congress, and provides full-text of committee prints from the 103rd Congress (1993) to the most recent Congress. The database includes abstracts and indexing for House & Senate Documents from 1970 to current, and indexing for House & Senate Documents from 1789 to 1969.

Lexis: The Committee Prints file (LEGIS;CMTPRN) provides the full-text of selected committee prints from the 104th Congress (1995) to present. The House & Senate Documents file (LEGIS:HSDOCS) has the full text of document form the 104th Congress (1995) to current.


**Committee Prints / House & Senate Documents in Print**

The most complete source of committee prints and House & Senate documents available in the library is the CIS microfiche set. House Documents, Senate Documents, House, Senate, and Joint Conference Committee Prints are available on microfiche as part of this set. Committee prints from 1970 to current are in the Microforms Collection, 1st Floor). To locate documents or committee prints in this set, you will need the CIS number from your research in the indexes.

**CONGRESSIONAL RECORD**

The Congressional Record is the primary source for floor debates in Congress. However, it is important to note that this is not a verbatim transcript of congressional debates, because legislators frequently add to, delete from, and revise their statements. The Congressional Record is published daily when either house is in session.

**Congressional Record Online**

ProQuest Congressional (available via the Wise Law Library Research Resources page): This database includes the Congressional Record from the 99th Congress (1985) to current.

HeinOnline (available via the Wise Law Library Research Resources page) has selected legislative histories available in a full-text, fully searchable format. Click on the U.S. Federal Legislative History Library.

LexisNexis: The Congressional Record file (LEGIS;RECORD) contains the Congressional Record from the 99th Congress (1985) to date.
Westlaw: The Congressional Record is available in the CR database from the 99th Congress (1985) to date.

Thomas: http://thomas.loc.gov - includes the Congressional Record from the 101st Congress (1989) to present.

FDSys offers access through its new digital document platform to the Congressional Record from 1994 to present.

GPO Access http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/ - includes the Congressional Record from the 104th Congress (1995) to present.

Congressional Record in Print

Congressional Record [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 35 .U583]

- The Congressional Record is originally published as a softbound daily version, and then repaginated and bound as a hardcover version. There are some differences in the two versions, but probably the most important difference is that the two versions do not use the same system of pagination.

- The bound Daily Digest volumes for the 80th Congress (1947) to date give a history of bills enacted into public law in table form. This table lists the public law number, the bill number, committees to which referred, dates and numbers of committee reports, and the date of passage by each house with a citation to the appropriate pages.

- The "Index" volumes contain a section on the history of bills and resolutions. It is arranged by bill number, and gives report numbers and pages on which the measures were debated.

Finding Congressional Debates Prior to 1873

Prior to the first publication of the Congressional Record in 1873, congressional debates were reported in the Annals of Congress [1st Congress (1789)-18th Congress (1824)], the Register of Debates [18th Congress (1824)-25th Congress (1834)], and the Congressional Globe [23rd Congress (1833)-42nd Congress (1873)].

Annals of Congress [HeinOnline]

The Register of Debates [LAW RARE BOOKS basement KF 35 .U56 and HeinOnline].

The Congressional Globe is available in [LAW RARE BOOKS basement KF 35 .U57 and HeinOnline]. All three publications are available online at the Library of Congress's American Memory Project at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amla w/.

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

The most comprehensive source of presidential documents is the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents. It has been published since 1965 (Lyndon B. Johnson). For pre-1965 papers of presidents, you may find what you need in a variety of publications. Executive orders and proclamations from 1936 forward are published in:

Federal Register [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 70 .A2]. From 1936 through current it is also available from HeinOnline.

Title 3 of the Code of Federal Regulations [LAW MICROFORMS 1st floor KF 70 .A3f].

USCCAN [LAW FEDERAL 1st floor KF 48 .U552 or Westlaw]

Title 3 of the United States Code [LAW STACKS 1st floor KF 5001 .A3 2010]
Presidential Documents Online

GPO Access
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wcomp/index.html - From 1993 to current, this Internet database is now the official place of publication for The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.

The National Archives and Records Administration maintains an Internet site that has the disposition tables for all Executive Orders from 1937 (Franklin D. Roosevelt) to current at http://www.archives.gov/federal_register/executive_orders/disposition_tables.html

The American Presidency Project is maintained by John Woolley and Gerhard Peters of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Their collection of Executive Orders starts in 1929 with the presidency of Herbert Hoover.

Presidential Documents in Print

The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents [LAW STACKS basement J 80 .A284 and HeinOnline]. From 1993 to current, it is available free online.

Hint: If you've looked everywhere, and can't find an Executive Order, put the information into Google Book Search. Google Book Search is scanning some Executive Orders.

Statutory Construction

The information located when you do legislative history research is usually meant to persuade a court that a particular interpretation of a statute is correct. In addition to the facts you have found, you may need to find persuasive legal authority. There is a body of case law that has been developed for interpreting legislative intent. Here are several useful places to look:


Last updated March 2013
Prepared by Susan Nevelow Mart, Director of the Law Library and Associate Professor

Copyright © 2012 University of Colorado Law School. Redistribution or commercial use is prohibited without express written permission.