

RESEARCH GUIDE

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY - HOW TO FIND (FEDERAL AGENCIES)

George Mason University Libraries

INTRODUCTION

In a nutshell, laws mandated federal agencies. Every law has some kind of legislative history, be it long or short. Before a law is enacted, it starts out as a bill, which is introduced by a member of Congress. This bill is given a number, which becomes very important for finding legislative histories, because, it is a major link to them. In other words, if you know the bill number of a law, you have a direct link to its legislative history.

In addition to finding the legislative history of a law through the bill number, some commercial products and government sources will provide a direct link to the legislative history of a law through citations or by other means. For example, the legislative history might be linked to the citations or features of the following:

United States Statutes-at-Large (USSL) - Chronicles laws passed by each session of Congress. The laws are listed chronologically, the order in which they were passed. The **USSL citation** appears as, **108 STAT 1796**. The first number is the volume of USSL. In this example its volume 108. STAT is abbreviated for USSL. The next number is the page where the law begins. In this example it begins on page 1796.

NOTE: The bill number of the law can be found on the side (top) left/righthand margin. Above the bill's number is the date it was passed into law.

Public Law (PL) - Each law passed by congress is numbered chronologically. The **PL citation/number** is written as, e.g., **PL103-1**. PL is public law; what follows is the session of Congress which passed the law. In this example it is the 103rd Congress. The number following the hyphen is the chronological number of the law passed by Congress. In this example, it is the first public law passed by the 103rd Congress. **NOTE: The PL and USSL citations correspond to each other. Therefore, if you are searching for a law in its original language, the PL & USSL citations will refer you to the same law in USSL.**

United States Code (USC) - Chronicles laws currently being enforced. The laws are codified into 50 subject titles. The **USC citation** appears in this format: **5 USC 552**, The first number represents the title of USC. In this example, it is Title 5. USC is the abbreviation for the United States Code.

Last, is the number representing the section of the title. In this example it is section 552.

Subject/keyword search using selected online databases

Although finding a law's legislative history through these options is a good asset, it still behooves one to know the desired law's bill number. This is necessary because many laws have parts that relate to each other; or the text of certain sections of the laws is similar in language.

One last brief note about finding legislative histories regards the law itself. Sometimes one may look for the legislative history of a law based on the name of a certain section of the law, e.g., Violence Against Women Act (Title IV of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994/VCCLEA). The "Violence Against Women Act" is a section within VCCLEA. Therefore, to get its legislative history means you have to get the legislative history of VCCLEA. The "Violence Against Women Act" does not have its own legislative history.

3 BASIC STEPS

Step 1. Locating basic information about the agency's creation.

- The United States Government Manual, **Ref Desk (Fenwick & JCL) Ready reference JK 404 .U5**
- The Federal Regulatory Directory, **Ref Desk (Fenwick & JCL) Ready reference KF 5406 .A15 F4**
- The United States Code - Index, **Reference Gov. Doc, GP 3.22/2:19 (Fenwick)**
- United States Code Service/USCS - Index, **Reference Gov. Doc, KF62 1972 .L38 (Fenwick)**

Computer Sources (available at all GMU libraries)

- * Congressional Universe <http://furbo.gmu.edu/dbwiz/gov> (1970 -)
- * GPO Access <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/> (date varies)
- * Thomas/ Legislative Information on the Internet <http://thomas.loc.gov> (1973 -)

Step 2. Type of information found in the above mentioned books (in general):

United States Government Manual – Information about the agency, including the date it was enacted and its USC citation.

Federal Regulatory Directory -- Information about the agency including the date it was enacted; and the USC citation, USSL citation and/or the Public Law citation/number.

NOTE: *Often at the end of the chapter is a chronology of major legislation regarding the agency, beginning with the law which created the agency.*

The **Indexes of the United States Code and the United States Code Service** -
- These sources refer you to a companion volume, where you can get the USC citation, the PL number/citation and/or the USSL citation.

Step 3. Select the appropriate source to retrieve the desired legislative history.

NOTE: The **DATE** a bill became law is critically important because, so often, the sources you can use (especially books) to get its legislative history are organized by some aspect of the date, e.g., the year. Below are sources owned by GMU that provide legislative histories.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE DATES COVERED.

NOTE: *Unless otherwise noted, the books are located in Fenwick Library's Reference Dept. Sources accessible through the computer are available at all GMU libraries.*

CCH/Congressional Index (REF KF 49 .C6 1983 -) Refer to the volume that includes the year the bill number was enacted into law. Refer to "Status of House (or Senate) Bill" section.

CIS/Index (Ref KF49 .C62; 1970 -) Refer to the volume that corresponds to the year the bill became a law **OR** if the year is 1984 or after, refer to the Legislative History volume for the appropriate year.

CIS Congressional LexisNexis

<http://furbo.gmu.edu/dbwiz/gov>

Click in the following order "Congressional LexisNexis;" and "Bills, Laws, & Regulations." Select the appropriate category.

Congressional Record Index (Gov. Doc Ref; 1873-1988 Microform; 1983 - , Books) Refer to the date of the CR Index that includes the date the bill became law. Look for the bill number in the **SENATE BILL** or **HOUSE BILL** section of the index.

Internet - <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/hob/index.html>

The main page will only search for the current year. For older bills go to <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/hob/search.html> select the year that includes the date the bill was signed into law. Type in the appropriate bill number, e.g., H.R. 3355, enclosed in quotations. On the next screen click on the TEXT link after the bill number adjacent to the year in which the bill was enacted. **OR** Select **Public Laws (1995/96 [104th Congress] - current)**. Select the number of the Congress which passed the law, e.g., 104 for the 104th Congress. Type in the appropriate number for either of the following citations, enclosed in quotations, exactly:

"H.R. 3802" or "public law 104-231" or "5 usc 552" or "110 stat 3048"

NOTE: *"History of Bills" is part of the online version of Congressional Record Index. "Public Laws," is the online equivalent of the U.S. Statutes at Large, listed below.*

Digest of Public and General Bills and Resolutions (Gov. Doc Ref KF18 .L5; 1969 - 1990.)

Each volume has several indexes. Refer to the one that includes the date the law was enacted.

Federal register (Gov. Docs KF70 .A2)

NOTE: *Due to space restrictions the Federal register is shelved after "US Court Tax Report" (KF6280 .A275)*

GPO Access - <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

U.S. Government Printing Office that provides free electronic access to a wealth of important information products produced by the Federal Government. Includes: Federal Register; CFR, Congressional Record, Federal Budget as well as other resources.

Library of Congress - THOMAS <http://thomas.loc.gov> (1973 -)

Under "LEGISLATION," Select appropriate option under "Bill Summary and Status."

U.S. Code and Administrative News (1980 -) Refer to the volume that includes the date the law was enacted.

United States Statutes at Large (Gov. Doc; KF50 .U6, 1975 -)

Internet - See Public Laws (1995 -) under "Congressional Record Index.

Since 1975, a brief legislative history is included on the last page of the text of the laws.

NOTE: *The years 1975 - , refer only to those volumes that include legislative histories. Previous volumes do not have legislative histories.*