



Alaska State Court Law Library

Reference Desk (Anchorage) ▪ 907-264-0585
Toll-free within Alaska ▪ 888-282-2082
Reference Desk Email ▪ library@akcourts.us
Library Website ▪ courts.alaska.gov/library

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The legislative history of a federal law is the record of legislative events preceding its passage. It may explain the motivation for the legislation or may help to interpret statutory language. A complete legislative history includes reports of the Congressional committees considering the legislation, Congressional debates and testimony offered at committee hearings.

DEFINITIONS

BILLS

Text of proposed legislation. Available from 1973 on the Congress.gov website and from 1993 on the govinfo website.

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Statements and testimony given before public Congressional committees considering legislation. Hearings are available on the govinfo website from 1961-80 and 1985-present.

COMMITTEE PRINTS

Background research studies prepared for Congress. Prints from 1991 are available on the govinfo website.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Analysis by Congressional committees of proposed legislation, its likely effect, and value. Selected reports reprinted in USCCAN from 1941. Current reports from 1995 are available on the govinfo website.

CONGRESSIONAL DEBATES

Transcripts of legislative debates and proceedings published in the Congressional Record. Remarks are subject to subsequent revision or amendment. Available on the Congress.gov website from 1989; and from 1994 on the govinfo website. [Congressional Record Vols. 1-160 \(1873-2014\)](http://Congressional Record Vols. 1-160 (1873-2014)), and Vols. 126-164 of the Congressional Record Daily (1980-2018) are also located in HeinOnline.

PRESIDENTIAL SIGNING STATEMENTS

When signing bills into law presidents sometimes issue statements explaining why they did so. Only recently have they come to include analysis of the law. The value of these statements as part of the legislative history is controversial. Can be found in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (1991-2013) on the govinfo website.

PUBLIC LAWS; STATUTES AT LARGE

Legislation passed by Congress. We have the Statutes at Large 1845-2011 in the Law Library. Available from 1973 on the Congress.gov website; from 1951 on the govinfo website; and from 1789-2011 on HeinOnline.

RESOURCES

See **Document Sources** section for specific dates and locations of federal legislative history materials.

ARNOLD & PORTER COLLECTION - WESTLAW

<https://www.westlaw.com/Browse/Home/LegislativeHistory/ArnoldPorterLegislativeHistories>

Contains about two dozen comprehensive and full-text searchable federal legislative histories compiled by the Arnold & Porter law firm's librarians. Available to court staff on Westlaw and to public patrons on library computers.

CONGRESS.GOV

<https://www.congress.gov/>

Provides online access to current federal legislative history materials. Dates of available publications vary.

GOVINFO.GOV WEBSITE

<https://www.govinfo.gov/>

Provides online access to current federal legislative history materials. Dates of available publications vary.

HEINONLINE

<http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Welcome>

HeinOnline is an image-based database that contains, inter alia, federal legislative materials such as the Congressional Record and the Statutes at Large. It also includes comprehensive federal legislative histories published by the GPO and private publishers and a source based on Nancy Johnson's Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories. Available to state employees and on library computers.

USCCAN

The United States Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN) provides the text of federal acts and selected committee reports. It also includes references to all reports, even if not reprinted, and dates of consideration and passage in Congress. Available in print in the Law Library and on Westlaw.

PROCESS

1. **Look for the Public Law number, Statute at Large citation and enactment date** in one of the following sources: (e.g. *Pub.L. 91-513, 84 Stat. 1285 (1970)*)
 - *Shepard's Acts and Cases by Popular Name* (Reference) (Current only to 1991)
 - *United States Code* (USC)
 - *United States Code Annotated* (USCA)
 - *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News* (USCCAN)
 - *United States Code Service* (USCS)
 - *U.S. Statutes at Large*

2. **Look for the bill or resolution number** in one of the following resources:
 - *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News* (USCCAN)
 - *U.S. Statutes at Large*
 - *Congress.gov*
 - *govinfo.gov*

3. **Look for Already Compiled Legislative Histories:**
 - The Anchorage Law Library has compiled histories of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), among others.
 - *Congressional Information Service/Index* (1970-2001 available in Law Library). Look for separate legislative history volumes.
 - HeinOnline includes comprehensive federal legislative histories published by the GPO and private publishers, and a source based on Nancy Johnson's *Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories*.
 - The *Arnold & Porter Legislative Histories*, in Westlaw, offers more than 30 searchable compiled legislative histories.
 - Law Review articles may include extensive analysis of legislative history of a law. Search HeinOnline or Index to Periodical Articles Related to Law on HeinOnline.
 - Nancy Johnson's *Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories* (1789-1996) - citations to compiled histories. (Reference KF42.2 1979). Also located in HeinOnline in the *U.S. Federal Legislative History Library*.
 - Check *USCCAN* for selected texts and citations to documents (Reading Room, 35A).
 - Check the bottom of the last page of individual laws in *U.S. Statutes at Large* (Reading Room, range 28) or slip laws for legislative history citations.
 - Check the online catalog for titles containing the words "legislative history."

If you can't locate an already-compiled history, you will need to compile your own using the available resources.

4. Determine which resources are available:

Laws before 1941

Congressional Record
Public Laws in United States Statutes at Large

Laws 1941- 1976

Congressional Record
Selected committee reports in USCCAN
Public Laws

Laws 1977-1996

Bills
Congressional Record
Selected committee reports in USCCAN
Public Laws

Laws after 1996

Bills
Congressional Record
Selected committee reports in USCCAN
Committee reports on Congress.gov website
Committee reports on Govinfo website
Public Laws

DOCUMENT SOURCES

Bills

Pre-1985 Ask library staff if you qualify for interlibrary loan
1989- Online at Congress.gov: <https://www.congress.gov>
1993- Online at govinfo: <https://www.govinfo.gov>

Committee Hearings

Pre-1970 Ask library staff if you qualify for interlibrary loan
1997- CIS microfiche at UAA Consortium Library
1993- WESTLAW: U.S. Congressional Testimony (USTESTIMONY)
1985- Online at govinfo: <https://www.govinfo.gov/>

Committee Prints

Pre-1970 Ask library staff if you qualify for interlibrary loan
1970-1976 CIS microfiche at UAA Consortium Library
1997- CIS microfiche at UAA Consortium Library
1991- Online at govinfo: <https://www.govinfo.gov/>

Committee Reports

1995- Online at Congress.gov: <https://www.congress.gov>
1995- Online at govinfo: <https://www.govinfo.gov/>
1997- CIS microfiche at UAA Consortium Library

Congressional Debates in the Congressional Record

1789-1824 HeinOnline – Annals of the Congress: Congressional Documents Library
1825-1837 HeinOnline – Register of Debates in Congress: U.S. Congressional Documents Library
1833-1873 HeinOnline – Congressional Globe: U.S. Congressional Documents Library
1873-2011 HeinOnline – Congressional Record: U.S. Congressional Documents Library
1980- HeinOnline – Congressional Record Daily: U.S. Congressional Documents Library
1985- WESTLAW (database: CR)
1989- Online at Congress.gov: Congressional Record
1994- Online at govinfo: Congressional Record

Presidential Signing Statements

1965-2009 HeinOnline - U.S. Presidential Library: Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents
2009- HeinOnline - U.S. Presidential Library: Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents
1991-2013 Online at govinfo: Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States

OTHER RESOURCES

INTERNET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE – LEGISLATIVE HISTORIES

http://www.justice.gov/jmd/ls/legislative_histories/legislative-histories.html

- 30 legislative histories that were compiled by the U.S. Department of Justice Library Staff
- Digitized and available for general use

CONGRESS.GOV <https://www.congress.gov>

- Committee Reports (1995-current)
- Congressional Bills (full text 1989-current, summaries 1973-current)
- Congressional Record (text 1989-current, index 1995-current)
- Public Laws (1973-current)
- Roll Call Votes (1989-current)

GOVINFO.GOV <https://www.govinfo.gov/>

- Committee Hearings (1995-current)
- Committee Prints (1995-current)
- Committee Reports (1995-current)
- Compilation of Presidential Documents (1993-current)
- Congressional Bills (1993-current)
- Congressional Documents (1975-current)
- Congressional Record (text 1994-current, index 1983-current)
- History of Bills and Resolutions (1983-current)
- Public Laws (1995-current)

HEINONLINE <http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Welcome>

- U.S. Federal Legislative History
- United States Code
- U.S. Congressional Documents (including the Congressional Record)
- U.S. Presidential Library
- U.S. Statutes at Large

LEGAL RESEARCH BOOKS

- Elias, *Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law*, 17th edition
Call Number: KF 240 .E35 2015
- Jacobstein & Mersky, *Fundamentals of legal research*, 8th edition
Call Number: KF 240.J3 2002
- Olson, *Legal Research in a Nutshell*, 13th edition
Call Number: NUTSH LEGAL RESEARC
- Singer, *Statutes and Statutory Construction*, 7th edition
Call Number: KF 425 .S25 2007

UAA/APU CONSORTIUM LIBRARY

3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage, AK 99508
Call: (907) 786-1871
Text: (907) 312-1024

LAW LIBRARIANS' SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

Legislative Histories of Selected U.S. Laws on the Internet: Free Sources

<http://www.llsdc.org/Leg-Hist/>