

Researching Federal Legislative History

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Importance of Legislative History

- Interpretation of statutory provisions
 - Poor drafting
 - Ambiguous language
 - Passage of time
- Legislative intent is determinative

Conducting Legislative History

- Identify, locate and obtain relevant documents
- Analyze the documents
 - Congressional bills
 - Congressional hearings
 - Congressional committee reports
 - Congressional committee prints/re-prints
 - Congressional debates
 - Presidential signing & veto statements

What's REALLY important?

- Bill variations
- Committee reports
 - House
 - Senate
 - Joint
- Hearings
 - Witnesses are partisan advocates
 - Watch for disinterested objective testimony

What's sometimes helpful?

- Committee Prints/Re-Prints
 - Usually accompany a committee report
 - Studies
 - Views of committee members
- Congressional debates
 - Congressional Record
- Presidential information
 - Signing statement
 - Remarks (Sign or Veto)

Legislative History Strategies Use the code to find the session law(s)

7 U.S.C. § 4209

<p>7 U.S.C. § 4209</p> <p>Prohibition on maintenance of actions.</p> <p>This section shall not be deemed to provide a basis for any action, unless legal or equitable, by any persons or class of persons challenging a Federal project, program, or other activity that may affect landward. Provided, That the Government of an affected State whose a State policy or program exists to protect farmland may bring an action in the Federal district court of the district where a Federal program is proposed to enforce the requirements of section 4212 of title 16, United States Code.</p> <p>AMENDMENTS</p> <p>1988 - Pub. Law 100-591, § 101, added section 4209.</p>	<p>7 U.S.C. § 4209</p> <p>Prohibition on maintenance of actions.</p> <p>This chapter shall not be deemed to provide a basis for any action, unless legal or equitable, by any persons or class of persons challenging a Federal project, program, or other activity that may affect landward. Provided, That the Government of an affected State whose a State policy or program exists to protect farmland may bring an action in the Federal district court of the district where a Federal program is proposed to enforce the requirements of section 4212 of title 16, United States Code.</p> <p>AMENDMENTS</p> <p>1988 - Pub. Law 100-591, § 101, added section 4209.</p>
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Our Session Laws

- P.L. 97-98 (created statute)
Title XV, Subtitle I, §1548
95 Stat. 1344
Dec. 22, 1981
- P.L. 99-198 (amended statute)
Title XII, Subtitle F, § 1255(b)
99 Stat. 1518
Dec. 23, 1985

Let's get the bill numbers

- Lexis (97 P.L. 98)
- Westlaw (P.L. 97-98)
- [GPO Access](#)
- [Thomas](#)
- [HeinOnline](#)
- Google

What next? Look for a Compiled History

- [Hein Online](#)
- Lexis
- Westlaw
- [Lexis Congressional](#)
- Web (Google it)
- Print sources ([Worldcat.org](#))

DIY – But where do I look?

U.S.C.C.A.N. (print & online Westlaw)

GPO Access

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>

Thomas

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

[Lexis](#)

[Westlaw](#)

[Congressional](#)

More help

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY RESOURCES - On-Line Access						
Legislative Materials	GPO Access http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html	Thomas http://thomas.loc.gov	Lexis (Legis Library)	Westlaw USCCAN LII	Congressional Calendar	
Bills - Indexing	1971 - ongoing	1973 - ongoing	CIS Index 1970 ongoing	Monthly Catalog 1978 - ongoing	1979 - ongoing	
Bills - Full Text	1980 - ongoing	1989 - ongoing	1989 - ongoing	1983 - ongoing	1985 - ongoing	
Bills States/History	1987 - ongoing	1973 - ongoing	1993 - ongoing	CIS-Bills Current Withdrawal 1982 - ongoing	Bill Tracking Series 1989 - ongoing	
Bills - Presenting			1985 - ongoing	BC - Current SC-old 1989 ongoing	Hot Bills Topic Section - current legislation	
Congressional Record	Full Text 1994 - ongoing	Index 1994 Full Text 1989 ongoing	1/1/1981 ongoing	March 1985 ongoing	1985 - ongoing	
Public Laws - Full Text	1995 - ongoing	1973 - ongoing	1988	USCCAN-PL 1973 - current	1988 - ongoing	
Congressional Legislative Histories			Available for selected laws	Available for selected laws	1979 - ongoing	
Committee Reports	1995 - ongoing	1991 - ongoing	Selected 1996 Full Coverage 1993 - ongoing	From USCCAN 1988 - 1989 1990 - continuing all	1989 - ongoing	
Committee Hearings	1997 - ongoing	No	1990 - ongoing		1985 - ongoing	

Even More help

- CALI Lessons
- Law Librarians' Society of Washington D.C.
<http://www.llsdc.org/sourcebook/>

Ask Questions

Gulfport Reference Desk
727-562-7821

Tampa Reference Desk
813-228-6625 ext. 7540

Toll-free – 866-391-3221

E-mail: lawrefgp@law.stetson.edu

Contact information for individual librarians is available on the library's web page


