



Introduction

Statutory language may be ambiguous on its face or as applied to a specific set of facts. To get a better idea of what a legislature intended, you can review the documents created during the legislative process. These documents are called **legislative history**. Courts and attorneys often rely on legislative history to clarify statutory language.

Researching legislative history can be time consuming because of the amount of material that may be available. You don't have to research the legislative history for each statute you encounter. Before researching legislative history, reread the statute to make sure it's truly unclear. If it's ambiguous, search for caselaw or secondary sources interpreting the statute. Researching legislative history is generally considered a last resort.

Here are the documents included in a federal legislative history, in order of importance:

- Mark-Ups/amendments to a bill's text
- Committee reports
- Congressional debates published in the Congressional Record
- Congressional hearings
- Background materials collected by Congressional staff, such as Committee Prints and Committee Documents

Mark-Ups are committee meetings where members propose and consider amendments to a bill. If a bill is reported out of committee for consideration by the entire House or Senate, a committee report may be issued. Committee reports often describe the purpose of legislation and explain specific provisions. Debates on bills in the House and Senate may also be helpful, especially if a bill's sponsors discuss its purpose and meaning. Other types of documents can reveal background information considered by Congress.

Legislative history materials are available on subscription databases such as ProQuest Congressional, Westlaw, Lexis, and HeinOnline. Free sites, such as Congress.gov and Senate and House committee websites, contain legislative history as well.

The easiest way to find a legislative history for an act is to search by its public law number. A public law number consists of the session of Congress in which the law was passed and the number of the law as passed. For example, Pub. L. 100-690 is the 690th law passed during the 100th session of Congress. Committee reports also have a similar numbering system. H. Rept. 103-88 is the 88th House report issued during the 103rd Congress.

Public Law numbers can be found just below the text of sections in the U.S. Code. Here's an example:

18 U.S.C. § 1460. Possession with intent to sell, and sale, of obscene matter on Federal property

Whoever, either *** knowingly sells or possesses with intent to sell an obscene visual depiction shall be punished by a fine in accordance with the provisions of this title or imprisoned for not more than 2 years, or both.

(Added Pub. L. 100-690, title VII, §7526(a), Nov. 18, 1988, 102 Stat. 4503 ; amended Pub. L. 101-647, title III, §323(c), Nov. 29, 1990, 104 Stat. 4819.)

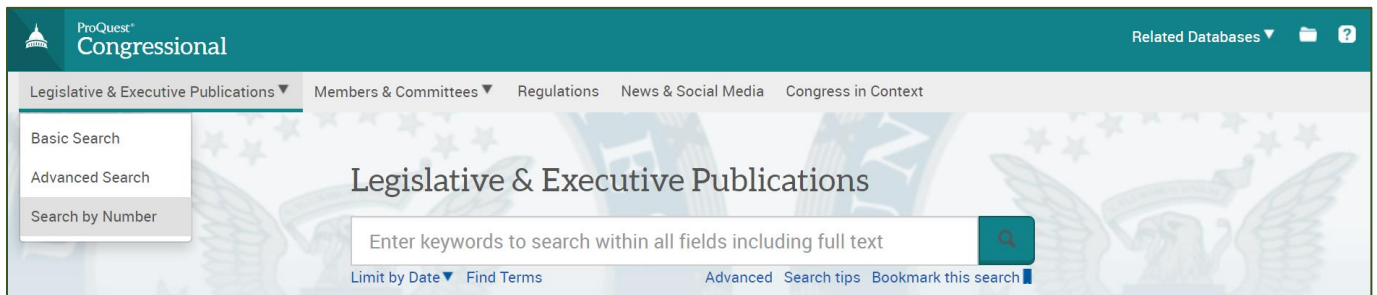
18 U.S.C. § 1460 was enacted by public law 100-690 in 1988 and amended by public law 101-647 in 1990. To do a complete legislative history for § 1460 you may have to review the legislative documents for both public laws. Once you have the public law citation(s) for the act or code section you are researching, you need to choose a source for the legislative history documents.

Subscription Services

- **ProQuest Congressional**

ProQuest Congressional is our most complete database for researching legislative history. Here's how to find the legislative history documents for Pub. L. 100-690:

- Click on **Search by Number** in the **Legislative and Executive Documents** drop down menu:

The screenshot shows the ProQuest Congressional website. The header is teal with the ProQuest logo and 'Congressional' text. A navigation bar below the header includes links for 'Legislative & Executive Publications', 'Members & Committees', 'Regulations', 'News & Social Media', and 'Congress in Context'. A left sidebar contains a search menu with 'Basic Search', 'Advanced Search', and 'Search by Number' (which is highlighted). The main content area is titled 'Legislative & Executive Publications' and features a search bar with the placeholder text 'Enter keywords to search within all fields including full text'. Below the search bar are links for 'Limit by Date', 'Find Terms', 'Advanced', 'Search tips', and 'Bookmark this search'.

- Select Public Laws, choose the session of Congress and input the Law Number.

The screenshot shows the 'Legislative & Executive Publications - Search by Number/Citation' page. It has a light blue header. Below the header, there's a section titled 'Show search options for:' with a list of search categories: 'All citation searches', 'Legislation' (which is expanded to show 'Congressional Bills' and 'Public Laws'), and 'Statutes at Large'. To the right of this list, there's a section for 'Public Laws' with the example 'e.g. 107 PL 15'. This section includes a 'Congress (e.g. 107)' dropdown menu currently set to '100th Congress (1987-1988)', a 'PL' label, and a 'Law Number (e.g. 15)' input field containing the number '690'. A teal button labeled 'Public Laws' is also visible.

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Legislative History Search Legislative History

Search Tips

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☆ Add to Favorites Set as start page Copy link

Search all Legislative History above or navigate to specific content below.

Federal

Congressional Record	U.S. Code Congressional & Administrative News	U.S. GAO Federal Legislative Histories
Legislative History - United States Code	U.S. Congressional Testimony	U.S. Political Transcripts

Tools & Resources

- Arnold & Porter Legislative Histories
- ABA Section of Criminal Justice Comments to Federal Agency Court
- CRS Bill Summary
- Federal Court
- Federal Tax
- Congressional

The federal legislative history databases in Westlaw include

- Congressional Record (debates)
- Legislative History-United States Code (committee reports)
- U.S. Code Congressional & Administrative News (public laws, committee reports, and presidential signing statements)
- U.S. Congressional Testimony (Congressional hearings)
- U.S. GAO Federal Legislative Histories (compiled legislative histories for selected public laws)
- U.S. Political Transcripts (Congressional hearings)
- Arnold & Porter Legislative Histories—compiled legislative histories for select acts that are full-text searchable

You can also access legislative history documents from within a U.S. Code section by selecting the History drop down menu.

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All content Enter terms, citations, databases, questions, anything ... All State & Federal

Search Tips Advanced

§ 1460. Possession with intent to sell, and sale, of obscene matter on Federal property

18 USCA § 1460 • United States Code Annotated • Title 18. Crimes and Criminal Procedure (Approx. 2 pages)

Document Notes of Decisions (0) History (142) Citing References (246) Context & Analysis (13) Powered by KeyCite

Table of Contents < § > Outline

- Editor's and Revisor's Notes (5)
- Versions (1)
- Legislative History Materials (136)
- Graphical Statute

United States Code Annotated

Title 18. Crimes and Criminal Procedure (Refs & Annos)

- Part I. Crimes (Refs & Annos)
- Chapter 71. Obscenity (Refs & Annos)

- Lexis Advance

On Lexis' main page, select the **Content Type** tab. Choose the **Statutes and Legislation** link and then the **Legislative Histories** link. Note that the Congressional Record, which contains Congressional debates, is on the **Statutes and Legislation** page, not the **Legislative Histories** page.

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Legislative History

Federal

[CERCLA Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[CIS/Historical Index](#) | ⓘ

[Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Clean Air Amendments of 1970 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Clean Water Act of 1977 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Committee Prints](#) | ⓘ

[Committee Reports](#) | ⓘ

[Congressional Documents 1777-present \(U.S. Serial Set\)](#) | ⓘ

[Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments of 1984 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[House and Senate Docs](#) | ⓘ

[House and Senate Floor Voting Records – 110th through current Congress](#) | ⓘ

[IRC Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Resource Conservation & Recovery Act of 1976 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Superfund Amendments & Reauthorization Act of 1986 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 Legislative History](#) | ⓘ

[Tax Legislative Histories, Combined](#) | ⓘ

The Legislative Histories page includes the following content

- Compiled legislative histories for selected acts
- Committee Reports
- Congressional Documents 1777-present—House and Senate Reports and Documents in PDF format
- US-CIS/Index—abstracts of legislative histories for public laws from 1970-present
- CIS/Historical Index—includes abstracts of House and Senate committee reports, documents, and hearings from 1789-1984
- Congressional Hearings

- HeinOnline

HeinOnline, in its U.S. Federal Legislative History Library, has a large collection of compiled legislative histories for selected acts in PDF format. The compiled histories are full-text searchable. You can also search by public law number and the name of the act.

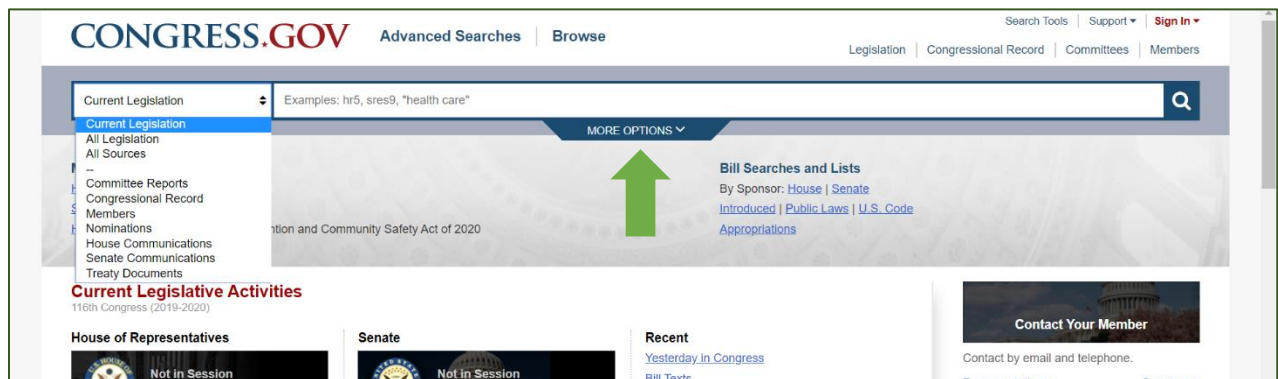


Free Websites

- Congress.gov

Congress.gov is the free go-to government resource for federal legislative history documents including bill texts, committee reports, the Congressional Record, and Public Laws.

The default search for Congress.gov is the current Congress, so if you want to search for legislation from prior Congresses you need to select **All Legislation**. You can also select the blue **MORE OPTIONS** tab underneath the search box to limit your search to a specific Congress, bill, or public law. Searching by citation can be tricky. For example, to search for a specific public law you need to use the citation *pl103-141*. Use the **Search Tools** link on the top right of the main page for information on how to search Congress.gov.



A search for *pl103-141* in All Legislation retrieves information for H.R. 1308, the enacted bill that became the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. (H.R. is an acronym for House of Representatives, not House report, which would be H. Rep. or H. Rept.) You can see the bill's sponsor, a related committee report, and (under the Text tab) different versions of the bill.

H.R.1308 - Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993

103rd Congress (1993-1994)

LAW

Hide Overview ✕

Sponsor: [Rep. Schumer, Charles E. \[D-NY-9\]](#) (Introduced 03/11/1993)

Committees: House - Judiciary

Committee Reports: H.Rept 103-88

Latest Action: 11/16/1993 Became Public Law No: 103-141. ([All Actions](#))

Roll Call Votes: There has been [1 roll call vote](#)

Tracker:

Introduced

Passed House

Passed Senate

Resolving Differences

To President

Became Law

More on This Bill

[CBO Cost Estimates \[0\]](#)

Subject — Policy Area:

Civil Rights and Liberties, Minority Issues

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Summary (2)

Text (6)

Actions (25)

Titles (5)

Amendments (0)

Cosponsors (170)

Committees (1)

Related Bills (1)

Text: H.R.1308

[Enrolled Bill](#)

Engrossed Amendment Senate (10/27/1993)

Placed on Calendar Senate (05/13/1993)

Engrossed in House (05/11/1993)

Introduced in House (05/11/1993)

Reported in House (05/11/1993)

[Listen to this page](#)

There are 6 versions: [Enrolled Bill](#)

Text available as: [TXT](#) | [PDF](#) (PDF provides a complete and accurate display of this text.) ?

[All Information](#) (Except Text)

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- House and Senate Committee Websites

Some House and Senate committees post mark-ups, which are changes or amendments to legislation, on their websites. For example, the House Committee on the Judiciary has videos of mark-up sessions.

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H.R. 3942, the “Preventing Online Sales of E-Cigarettes to Children Act”; H.R. 886, the “Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019”; H.R. 835, the “Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act of 2019”; H.R. 4258, the “Reauthorizing Security for Supreme Court ...

October 16, 2019 - 2:00pm

2141 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

Full Committee Markup on H.R. 3942, t...

Watch later

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Chairman Jerrold Nadler

More Information

- [Federal Legislative History Research: A Practitioner's Guide to Compiling the Documents and Sifting for Legislative Intent](#). Law Librarians' Society of Washington D.C.
- [Legislative History Research: A Guide to Resources for Congressional Staff](#) (2016 CRS Report) (use your W&M login to access).