
California Legislative History

Researching Legislative Intent in California

The Sacramento County Public Law Library has limited access to California legislative history material, especially for bills passed prior to 1993, when online information becomes available.

For bills prior to 1993, the Law Library has the Session Laws (annual record of enacted statutes), the Journal of the Senate, the Journal of the Assembly, and the Final History of each. These allow you to identify the bill number of any statute, and Chapter of any enacted statute. You can then construct a timeline of its journey through the legislature, including the committees that reviewed it, dates of floor debates, and dates and results of votes. However, the Law Library does not have access to most of the source material required to research the intent of the legislature, such as the actual committee reports, floor debate transcripts, and the like.

This guide lists the material that is available at the Law Library; points to useful online resources; and provides contact information for libraries and archives that collect more in-depth information.

Sacramento resources for legislative history

Two of the best resources for California legislative history are located here in Sacramento:

California State Archives (<https://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/legislative-resources/>)

1020 O Street, 4th Fl.

Sacramento, CA 95814

Reference Desk: (916) 653-2246

Email: ArchivesWeb@sos.ca.gov (<mailto:ArchivesWeb@sos.ca.gov>)

Resources include:

- Governor's, legislative, agency, and author bill files, containing analyses and correspondence
- Hearing files

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- Videotapes of selected hearings and floor sessions.

California State Library (<https://www.library.ca.gov/law/>)

914 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 323-9843

Bill books containing virtually all versions of bills since 1876; briefing papers, Committee reports, and reports of hearings are also available.

Also, both **McGeorge School of Law** (<https://mcgeorge.edu/Library>) and **UC Davis School of Law** (<https://law.ucdavis.edu/library/>) collect the *California Bills and Resolutions* set (containing all versions of bills) and related material.

Primary Sources

Bills and amendments; floor debates; committee analysis, hearings, and reports; legislators' and governor's files, interviews with legislators

The Law Library does not collect any of these important legislative history materials in print. Contact the resources listed above to investigate what primary sources may be available for the legislation you are researching. Other possible sources are listed at the end of this guide.

HathiTrust's California Legislative Publications 1850 - 2009

(<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/mb?a=listis&c=1808948120>) **collection (free website)** (including Senate and Assembly Bills (1911-1988); Statutes and Journals (1849-2009); Final Calendars (1899 - 2011))

California Legislative Counsel Bill Information beginning in 1993 (free website)

The Legislative Counsel has two free databases:

- 1999-current [California Legislative Information - Bill Search](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billSearchClient.xhtml) (<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billSearchClient.xhtml>)
- 1993-2016 [Official California Legislative Information-Bill Information](http://leginfo.ca.gov/) (<http://leginfo.ca.gov/>)

These contain all versions of bills, resolutions, and constitutional amendments, as well as their status, history, votes, analyses, and veto messages. You will find a summary of floor debates for some bills. The 1999-current version is easier to use, but the older version of the database occasionally contains more material on bills in the overlapping years.

Lexis Advance (by subscription, free in Law Library)

This commercial database contain some (not all) of the same material as the free Legislative Counsel site, conveniently linked to the statute and related material.

Hein Online (by subscription, free in Law Library)

- [U.S. State - California - State Statutes](https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=uscaliss&set_as_cursor=clear) (https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=uscaliss&set_as_cursor=clear): historical superseded statutes through 1948
- [U.S. State - California - Session Laws](https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=calisess) (<https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=calisess>): 1850-present
- [U.S. State - California - Constitutions](https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=cacowconst): (<https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=cacowconst>) pre-statehood, including Mexican material, to present

Statutes and Amendments to the Codes KFC30 .A2 (Compact)

This set contains “session laws” (laws passed in a particular legislative session, or year) in chronological order. In addition to the text that is ultimately included in the codified law, *Statutes and Amendments* may include the bill number, statements of intent, an Urgency Statement explaining the need for the statute, or a Legislative Counsel Digest summarizing the law. Publication in print is many years behind (as of 2023, the final volume is 2008).

Online: [Statutes and Amendments to the Code \(1850-2008\)](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/historical-information/archive-list?field_archive_type_value=statutes) (https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/historical-information/archive-list?field_archive_type_value=statutes), California State Assembly Archive

Journal of the Senate KFC14 .C355 Compact (1968-current)

Journal of the Assembly KFC14 .C35 Compact (1968-current)

These record the daily business of the legislative houses in some detail, including recording votes on bills and amendments, the movement of bills to and from committee, transmission of bills to the other house, messages from the Senate and from the Governor, and more. Use them to determine actions taken on your bill, committees reviewing, dates of floor debates and votes, and the like.

Usually no additional information is included, but you may occasionally find the text of an Urgency Statement, Legislative Counsel Opinion, summary of floor debates and committee reports, and Letters of Intent from bill authors. Use the Indexes (organized by topic and by bill number) to locate such items. They may be listed under the topic “Motions to print” since legislators must specifically request that they be included.

Tip: the Clerk of the Assembly website offers “mock” versions of each of these items, illustrating what information can be found within, at [Legislative Publications: Annotated Guides and Quick Fact Sheets](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/legislative-publications) (<https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/legislative-publications>)

Online:

- [Senate Journals \(2003-present\)](https://www.senate.ca.gov/dailyjournals) (<https://www.senate.ca.gov/dailyjournals>), California State Senate
- [Senate Journals \(1850-1963\)](https://archive.org/details/californiastatelibary?&and%5B%5D=creator%3A%22california.%20legislature.%20senate%22) (<https://archive.org/details/californiastatelibary?&and%5B%5D=creator%3A%22california.%20legislature.%20senate%22>), California State Archives
- [Assembly Journals \(1995-present\)](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/legislative-publications/daily-journals) (<https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/legislative-publications/daily-journals>), California State Assembly
- [Assembly Journals \(1850-2006\)](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/historical-information/archive-list) (<https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/historical-information/archive-list>), California State Assembly Archive

California Ballot Initiatives and Propositions

UC Hastings offers a free database of California ballot propositions and initiatives from 1911 to the present, including text, pamphlets, and legal and legislative history at [California Ballot Measures Database](https://repository.uclawsf.edu/ca_ballots/) (https://repository.uclawsf.edu/ca_ballots/)

The California Secretary of State’s office offers resources and historical information on statewide initiatives since 1912 as well as municipal, city, county, and school district elections at [Ballot Measures: Resources and Historical Information](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-measures/resources-and-historical-information/) (<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-measures/resources-and-historical-information/>).

Finding Aids

These collections of summaries, tables, and indexes list actions taken during the legislative session and refer you to the relevant source material.

Assembly Final History KFC 14 .L412 Compact (1973-current)

Senate Final History KFC 14 .L43 Compact (1973/74 – current)

Bound volumes containing a cumulative list of the bills in a legislative session, and actions taken on each. Also contains cross-references table linking enacted bills to session laws, and indexes by author and committee. Recent (unbound) years are entitled “Weekly History.”

Online:

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- [Senate Histories \(2009-present\)](https://www.senate.ca.gov/content/senate-histories) (<https://www.senate.ca.gov/content/senate-histories>), California State Senate
 - [Assembly Histories \(2009-present\)](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/legislative-publications/weekly-histories) (<https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/legislative-publications/weekly-histories>), California State Assembly
 - [California State Assembly and Senate Final History – 1881-2015](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/historical-information/archive-list?field_archive_type_value=histories), (https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/historical-information/archive-list?field_archive_type_value=histories) California State Assembly Archive
 - [California Legislative Publications 1850 – 2009](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/mb?a=listis&c=1808948120) (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/mb?a=listis&c=1808948120>), HathiTrust

Finding aids included in primary sources:

- “Summary Digest,” *Statutes and Amendments*: Since 1967, the final volume of each year’s *Statutes and Amendments* contains a “Summary Digest” listing the each session law chapter, the corresponding bill number and author, and a brief summary of its effects, and various indexes. They are also available as standalone paperback volumes starting in 1972.
- “Bill Action Index” and “Index to Bills” in both the *Journal of the Senate* and *Journal of the Assembly*. Prior to 1967, these are the best resources for a timeline of action on legislation.
- **West’s Annotated California Codes** KFC30 .W48 (through 2019)
Deering’s California Codes Annotated KFC30.5.D4 (also in LexisAdvance, in library only)
Use these to find basic information such as the current text of the law, bill number and Session Law citation, and dates and content of revisions. In addition, the annotations may include cross-references to related statutes and regulations, references to cases and articles, and other useful information.

Secondary Sources

These cannot prove legislative intent but may lead you to find important resources, or even compiled legislative histories, without starting from scratch.

Shepard’s California Citations, Statutes KFC39 .S5 (Compact, through 2018)

Shepard’s Citations (via LexisAdvance, in library only)

Use these citators to identify cases, statutory amendments, and repeals affecting the law.

Cases and briefs discussing the law in question

Using citators or annotations, you may locate cases interpreting your statute. The opinions and briefs may go into detail on legislative history and intent. Search by codified statute, not bill number.

Cases:

- **California Reports (Cal.)**, series 1-5 (ongoing) KFC 45 .A21 (Compact)
- **California Appellate Reports (Cal. App.)**, series 1-5 (ongoing) KFC 48 .A212 (Compact)
- LexisAdvance's California Cases databases
- Online: [California Official Reports Public Access](http://www.lexisnexis.com/clients/CACourts/) (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/clients/CACourts/>) page

Briefs:

- [LA Law Library's California Briefs](https://www.lalawlibrary.org/legal-research/our-collection/legal-briefs) (<https://www.lalawlibrary.org/legal-research/our-collection/legal-briefs>) (selective since 1995)

A more complete set of California briefs can be accessed at the State Law Library.

Law review and bar journal articles

May discuss or compile legislative history for particular statutes or topics of interest. The Law Library primarily offers these electronically, via **Hein Online** (best selection of California law reviews) and **Lexis Advance** (a few unique titles each, including some bar journals).

Electronic Access: On the Law Library's computers, using *HeinOnline* or *Lexis Advance*.

Since 1970, *The University of the Pacific Law Review* (formerly *McGeorge Law Review*) has published a yearly "Review of Selected California Legislation," known as the "Greensheets" issue. If your law is covered, you may find discussions, references and quotations from source material, and more. All years are available in Hein Online.

See also *Review of Selected Code Legislation* (1955, 1965, and 1967-1969) KFC30.5 .S7 (Historical).

California Law Revision Commission Reports KFC27 .C3 (Compact) 1955-present. (Online: [Printed Reports, Recommendations, and Studies](http://clrc.ca.gov/Menu3_reports/publications.html) (http://clrc.ca.gov/Menu3_reports/publications.html)) If the law you are researching was based on a recommendation from the Commission, you will find discussions of the issues that spurred legislation and the original proposed text.

Treatises and Reference Books

These discuss how legislative history can be prepared and then used to interpret statutes.

- **Cal. Jur. 3d, Statutes**, Sections 110-127 “Application of General Rules of Construction.” KFC80 .C3 (Ready Reference)
- **Statutes and Statutory Construction (Sutherland on Statutory Construction)** KF425 .S25
- **Legal Research in California** KFC 74 .H36 Chapter 7.18 lists sources, and chapter 19 gives a detailed example of how to prepare a California legislative history.
- **Henke’s California Law Guide** KFC 74 .H46. Chapter 4 explains in depth what you can find in different sources such as bill files, Senate and Assembly Journals, and more obscure sources.

See also L. Tobe Liebert, *Researching California Ballot Measures*, 90 Law Libr. J. 27 (1998).

Guides from Professional Legislative Intent Researchers

Several legislative intent research services have produced guides to researching legislative intent:

- **Practice Reference Guide to Legislative History and Intent Research** KFC74.A9 (Ref Desk). Legislative Intent Service, Inc.
- **Research & Practice Guide: California Legislative History & Intent** (https://lri-document-store.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/21185219/Research.and_.Practice.Guide_.pdf) KFC74.A9 C34 (Ref Desk). LRI History LLC.
- Legislative History & Intent offers a [collection of legislative and regulatory history research RESOURCES](http://www.legintent.com/state-statutory-legislative-research/) (<http://www.legintent.com/state-statutory-legislative-research/>) online.

Online Research Guides to California Legislative History

- McGeorge School of Law: “[California Legislative Histories](https://libguides.mcgeorge.edu/c.php?g=973121) (<https://libguides.mcgeorge.edu/c.php?g=973121>) ”
- UC Hastings Law Library: “[California Legislative History Research Guide](http://libguides.uchastings.edu/cal-leg-history). (<http://libguides.uchastings.edu/cal-leg-history>) ”
- UC Berkeley Law Library: “[California Legislative History Research](https://libguides.law.berkeley.edu/c.php?g=326647) (<https://libguides.law.berkeley.edu/c.php?g=326647>) ”
- California State Library: “[California Legislative History: Basic Online Research](https://www.library.ca.gov/law/online-research/) (<https://www.library.ca.gov/law/online-research/>) ”