



FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE HISTORY RESEARCH

Why do Florida legislative history research?

- to gather background information on the circumstances or events which led to the enactment of the statute
- to understand what the legislators intended the statute to accomplish when they enacted it
- to understand the meaning of terms contained in the language of the statute
- to understand how a statute should be construed and applied
- your supervisor assigns the project to you

What are the relevant Florida legislative history documents?

- Florida legislative history documents exist in an organized, comprehensive way since 1969. Very few documents were retained before that time.
- **bills:** text of the bill as introduced into the legislature and as amended during the legislative process; companion bills; useful to see the statute section in the context of other related bills introduced at the same time
- **committee hearings:** citizens, organizations, and experts are invited to speak about the bill; hearings are taped, but the tapes are not usually transcribed or indexed
- **committee reports:** short fact sheets of one or two pages
- **staff analyses:** considered the most important legislative history documents; prepared by committee staff; similar to a law office memorandum; summarize the bill, its probable effect, and its proposed changes; include statements about the purpose and need for the bill and the potential effects of the legislation; sometimes include fiscal notes or economic impact statements; analysis is updated if the House or Senate amends the bill
- **floor debates:** sometimes legislators make statements on the floor that shed light on the purpose of the bill; debates are taped, but the tapes are not usually transcribed or indexed
- **Journal of the Senate, Journal of the House of Representatives:** don't provide a full transcript of the proceedings; record only the formal actions taken by the Senate or House, including introduction of bills, reference to committees, and voting records; include the text of floor amendments
- **governor's statements:** include the governor's objection to any act he vetoes; sent to the house where the bill originated; statement will appear in the journal of that house

What is the process of conducting Florida legislative history research?

- Look at the relevant Florida statute section. Look at the history line and historical notes at the end of the statutory text, to identify the chapter numbers of the laws that enacted or amended the statute section. If you're interested in a particular part of the statute section, you might need to look at all listed laws, to see which law enacted or amended that part of the statute section.
- Using the chapter number of the relevant law, go to the Laws of Florida for that year, and look at the text of the law that enacted or amended your statute section. The House or Senate bill number is listed immediately below the chapter number of the law.
- Using the House or Senate bill number, go to that year's History of Legislation (1965 - 1987) or the Final Legislative Bill Information "Citator" (1988 and after), to get the history of the bill. Look up the bill number in the Senate Bill Actions Report or the House Bill Actions Report (in the History of Legislation) or in the History of Senate Bills or the History of House Bills section (in the Final Legislative Bill Information "Citator"). These sources provide the names of sponsors, dates of each action on the bill, including introduction, and an indication of any companion bills. References are to page numbers in the House or Senate Journal. Both publications are indexed by bill number, by Florida Statute chapter number, and by subject.
- If useful, look in the Senate or House Journal, to see text of floor amendments, or vote counts.
- Since 1998, all legislative history documents generated by the Florida legislative committees are available on the Internet, in full text. (See Internet research handout for URL's.)
- If the bill was enacted before 1998, call the appropriate source listed below for related legislative history documents, depending on when the bill was enacted.
- Audiotapes/CD's of committee hearings and floor debates for all bills are available from the sources below, depending on when the bill was enacted.
- **When calling, you must provide the law number, bill number, and year of the session when the bill was enacted.** Specify whether you need tapes/CD's of floor debates, committee hearings, or both.

Senate sessions from the last 2 – 3 years: Senate Document Center
Rm. 304, The Capitol
487-5915

House sessions from the last 2 – 3 years: House Document Center
Rm. 334, The Capitol
488-7475

Earlier Senate and House sessions: State Archives of Florida
R.A. Gray Building
245-6719

As a state agency, the Supreme Court is not charged for documents or tapes/CD's. We are asked to provide blank audiocassettes or CD's in the same number of copies they provide to us, however. We are required to go to the appropriate office to pick up the documents or tapes/CD's. The limit is 100 pages and/or two bill files per day, and requests can often be filled on the same day of the request.