

Researching Online Sources for Michigan Legislative History

Michigan legislative history is the pre-enactment history of a Michigan public act. By examining the background and events prior to enactment of a House or Senate bill, a researcher can determine legislative intent.

A researcher may consult both official and unofficial sources. The official sources are House and Senate journals, bills, committee records, and public acts. The unofficial sources include, but are not limited to, House and Senate bill analyses, legislative studies and reports, and nongovernmental information such as newspaper and journal articles.

To find legislative history for a public act passed before 1997, a researcher will need to rely on traditional print materials that have been collected by libraries and archives throughout the state. Over the years, a number of online guides have been developed to help researchers locate these materials. The guides serve as detailed pathfinders to the sources described above.

The most comprehensive guide, *Sources of Michigan Legislative History*, was prepared by the legislative research division of the Michigan Legislative Service Bureau. It is available at http://www.michigan.gov/hal/0,1607,7-160-17449_18639_18656-52439--,00.html. A slightly shorter but updated version of the guide is included in the *Michigan Manual*, published biennially by the Michigan Legislative Service Bureau under the direction of the Michigan Legislative Council. It is available on the Michigan Legislature website at <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/mileg.asp?page=MM2003-2004>. Click on "Chapter III—The Legislative Branch" and scroll down to the end of the outline of that chapter. Then click on "Sources of Michigan Legislative History."

Library-Specific Guides

Researchers using the University of Michigan libraries or Wayne State University's Arthur Neef Law Library can take advantage of two online guides:

- The University of Michigan Documents Center created an extensive bibliography, *Michigan Legislative Histories*, at <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/michleg2.html>. It lists resources readily available on the University of Michigan campus and from the State Capitol in Lansing. Campus resources are identified by location and call number.
- Wayne State University's Arthur Neef Law Library offers an online guide, *Michigan Legislative Histories*, at http://www.lib.wayne.edu/lawlibrary/subject_guides/michleghist.php. It lists resources and points the researcher to the exact shelving range in the library where the items are located.

The Michigan Legislature Website

Researching the history of a Michigan public act became much easier with the launch of the Michigan Legislature website in 1997. Available at <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>, this resource is a free service of the Legislative Internet Technology Team in cooperation with the Michigan Legislative Council, the Michigan House of Representatives, and the Michigan Senate.

Accessing Online Documents

The site provides online access to many of the documents that shed light on legislative intent:

- Bills—Four full-text versions are available: 1) the bill as introduced; 2) the bill as passed by the chamber of origin; 3) the bill as passed by the other chamber; and 4) the bill as passed in its final, or enrolled, ver-

sion. This final version will be identified as the public act.

- Analysis—The House Fiscal Agency, the House Legislative Analysis Section (prior to 2004), and the Senate Fiscal Agency write analyses to explain the purpose of a bill by providing information about the problem or issue the legislation addresses. One bill may have multiple analyses because the agencies frequently revise their analysis when a bill is amended or when a substitute version is offered. A final analysis accompanies the enrolled bill.
- History—This portion of the site contains the history of each bill as reported in the House and Senate journals. An outline of the history includes the date of each action on a bill, a page reference to the House or Senate journal in which that action appears, and a link to the full text of the journal. Selecting a link to a journal will retrieve the entire issue. Using the "Find" feature to search for the bill number or the exact page reference will retrieve the desired text.

Conducting a Search

The easiest and most direct way to search for the legislative history of a public act is to use the "Public Acts (Signed Bills)" search option, listed under "Legislature" in the site's left-side navigation. When you click on "Public Acts (Signed Bills)," the next page provides search boxes for a "Public Act Legislative Document Search" for acts passed from 2001 to the present. Type the number of the public act in the "Public Act Number" search box. Then select the year the act was passed from the drop-down list for "Public Act Year" and click on "Search." The search results provide key information about the act, including the original bill number, the public act and effective date, the sponsor's name, and a brief description of the bill's content. This is

followed by one or more versions of the bill, the analyses, and an outline of the full history. You can search for the legislative history of a public act from 1997 through 2000 by clicking on "Archived Sessions" next to "Public Act Legislative Document Search."

House Committee Information Goes Online

In January 2005, the House of Representatives began providing online access to House committee materials. Copies of written testimony and official minutes are available at <http://house.michigan.gov/committees.asp>.

Use the drop-down menu at the bottom of the committee's page to select a particular committee, such as agriculture. Each committee's page includes a link to "Committee Testimony" and to "Committee Minutes." Testimony is arranged by date and includes the name of the person testifying and/or the name of the organization represented. A reference to a bill number or a subject may be included.

Researchers who wish to refresh their memories about the legislative process can refer to a number of publications on the Michigan Legislature website.

Click on "Publications" in the site's left-side navigation. Scroll down to "General Interest Publications" and look for *A Citizen's Guide to State Government* and *How a Bill Becomes a Law*.

Full-text versions of House, Joint, and Senate rules are also available. The latest edition of the state's biennial publication, the *Michigan Manual*, offers fundamental reference information about Michigan, including extensive coverage of the legislature and the legislative process.

Conclusion

Keep in mind that the Michigan Legislature website is a relatively new resource that is frequently revised, so watch for changes as you use the site. The Library of Michigan's State Law Library can help you navigate the site. For assistance, call (517) 373-0630 or e-mail lmlawlib@michigan.gov. ◆

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