



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY

NORTH CAROLINA LEGISLATIVE HISTORY
STEP BY STEP

This is a basic outline of the process and resources for researching the history of a North Carolina bill or statute. Much of the research involves traditional print materials located in the North Carolina Legislative Library, but certain recent information is available on the Web at <http://www.ncleg.net/> and <http://www.ncleg.net/LegLibrary/>

The Library staff will assist patrons with their research, but services do not include compiling legislative histories. For Library hours and information see <http://www.ncleg.net/LegLibrary/>

Additional tools for researching legislative history and a list of internal links are located at the end of this guide. *

Review *How a Law is Made* at <http://www.ncleg.net/NCGAInfo/Bill-Law/bill-law.html>

Start Here
if you know the
YEAR or SESSION the
bill was introduced.

1. Find the bill number on the NCGA web page, House or Senate journals, or session laws. When you have the bill number, go to step 7.

Start here
if you know the
STATUTE SECTION.

2. Look first in the current statutes. These are free online at www.ncleg.net or <http://www.ncleg.net/Statutes/Statutes.html> (read caveats carefully) or in print in many law and public libraries. The print version is the official version and contains editorial notes and other helpful material not in the unofficial web version. Current statutes are also available through paid online services.
3. If your section isn't in the current statutes, check the out-of-date (superseded) statutes. Superseded statutes are available in the Legislative

Office Building Library, the Supreme Court Library, the State Library, and law school libraries.

4. **After finding the statute section, locate the history note in parentheses at the end of the statute. This will lead you to the session law number.** *Example 1:* "1983, c. 814, s. 1." refers to section 1 of Chapter 814 of the 1983 Session Laws. *Example 2:* "S.L. 1997-210," refers to Chapter 210 of the 1997 Session Laws. Abbreviations and a User's Guide are located in the front of each volume of the General Statutes.
5. **Locate the session laws listed in the history note.** The print volumes of Session Laws are available in the Legislative Library, the Supreme Court Library, the State Library, and law school libraries. They are [online](#) for certain years (local laws beginning in 1959; public laws beginning in 1983). The Internet Archive has a hodgepodge of session laws as well, some back to the 1800s. <http://www.archive.org/>
6. **Read each session law to see if it affects the language you're researching.** Check each change listed in the history note until you find the change(s) you are researching. Once you have the **bill number from the heading of the session law, go to Step 7.**

**Start here
if you know the
BILL NUMBER.**

7. **Using the bill number, compile the chronological bill history.** Bill histories are online beginning in 1985 and on microfilm from 1969-1984. We have old computer printouts for bills from the 1973-1975 and 1979-1983 sessions. For earlier sessions, use the House and Senate Journals, which index bills by page references. Write down each action on the bill and the date of the action, including all committees to which the bill was referred. For each bill, go through this process in both the House and Senate Journals. If the online or print source shows a companion bill, follow the same steps for the companion bill. Use the [Legislative Library Documents Locator](#) to locate print and filmed bill histories.
8. **Review the bill in the bill books, the microfilm collection, or State Archives.** It may be useful to look at all versions of the bill. For example, the draft version may have information not found in later editions of a bill, including a drafting code and other prefatory material indicating who drafted the bill, whether it originated in a study committee, whether a fiscal or actuarial note was filed, and whether it was recommended by an agency or other entity. Use the [Legislative Library Documents Locator](#) to find the location of bill books.
9. **Identify the committees that considered the bill and review their minutes.** Using the bill history from Step 7, review the minutes from the standing committee(s) which considered the bill. These are summary minutes only (not verbatim or transcribed), but you may find bill analyses

and explanatory memoranda by legislative analysts here. Depending on the dates, committee minutes are in notebooks in the LB Library or on microfilm in the LOB Library. Use the [Legislative Library Committee Minutes Page](#) to locate minutes.

10. **Determine whether the bill originated in a study or another interim committee.** If a non-standing (study) committee recommended the bill, a study report or committee minutes may be available. You might learn this from the drafting code in the bill's caption, the long title of the bill, session law indexes, or another reference source. Use the [Legislative Library Studies Page](#) to identify online reports and older reports in the Legislative Library. The Legislative Library also has a collection of study committee minutes in microfilm and print beginning in the late 1960s. Use the [Legislative Library Committee Minutes Page](#) to locate committee minutes. If the General Statutes Commission recommended the bill, General Statutes Commission memoranda or other research resources may be available from the [General Statutes Commission \(GSC\)](#). (The Legislative Library and Supreme Court Library have limited portions of GSC resources).
11. **Floor debate may be available.** Floor debate is recorded in the Senate and transferred to the State Archives following session. Senate recordings are available for 1977, 1979-2002 (tapes) and 2003 forward (CDs). Contact the Senate Principal Clerk's Office for the current session recording. The House chamber audio archives begin with the 2009 session and are [online](#).
12. **Summaries of legislation.** The Research Division publishes post-session [Summaries of Substantive Ratified Legislation](#), which are available at the Legislative Library or [online](#). The [School of Government](#) provides bill digests in its Daily Bulletin series and offers post-legislative summaries.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS FOR RESEARCHING NORTH CAROLINA LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

[NC Legislative History Guide \(NC Supreme Court Library\)](#)

[NC Legislative History Guide \(UNC Law Library\)](#)

[Finding Federal and North Carolina Legislative History on the Web \(UNC Law Library\)](#)

[Wake Forest Professional Center Library Resource Guides](#) (link under construction)

[North Carolina Legislative Process \(NC State University course\)](#)

The General Assembly of North Carolina: a Handbook for Legislators / Joseph S. Ferrell
Legislative Library stacks JK 4171 1997

Work in Progress: The North Carolina Legislature / Henson P. Barnes (1993)
Legislative Library stacks JK 4166 .B37 1993

INTERNAL LINKS:

Current North Carolina General Statutes

<http://www.ncleg.net/Statutes/Statutes.html>

North Carolina Session Laws

<http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/EnactedLegislation/ELTOC.pl?sType=Law>

Legislative Library Documents Locator

<http://www.ncleg.net/library/Documents/web%20Legislative%20Library%20Documents%20Locator.pdf>

Legislative Library Studies Page

<http://www.ncleg.net/library/Collections/studies/studies.html>.

Legislative Library Committee Minutes Page

<http://www.ncleg.net/library/LegHistMaterials/leghistmaterials.html>

General Statutes Commission

<http://www.ncdoj.com/About-DOJ/Legal-Services/Legal-Resources/General-Statutes-Commission.aspx>

Summaries of Substantive Ratified Legislation

<http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/DocumentSites/browseDocSite.asp?nID=1&sFolderName=\Research%20Division\Summaries%20of%20Substantive%20Ratified%20Legislation>

N.C. School of Government

<http://www.sog.unc.edu/pubs/nclegis/index.html>

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