



NORTH CAROLINA  
LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY

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NORTH CAROLINA LEGISLATIVE HISTORY  
STEP BY STEP

Following is a basic outline of the process and resources for researching the history of a North Carolina bill or statute. Most of the research involves traditional print materials located in the North Carolina Legislative Library, but certain recent information is available on the Web. See <http://www.ncleg.net/> and <http://www.ncleg.net/LegLibrary/>. The Library staff will assist patrons with their research, but its services do not include compiling legislative histories. For Library hours and information see <http://www.ncleg.net/LegLibrary/>. Additional resources for researching legislative history are listed at the end of this guide. \*

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**Start Here**

if you know the  
**YEAR OR SESSION** the  
**BILL WAS INTRODUCED.**

1. **Find the bill number using the House or Senate journals or the session laws. Go to step 6 when you have the bill number.**

**Start here**

if you know the  
**STATUTE SECTION.**

2. **Look first in the current statutes. If the section isn't there, check the superseded (out-of-date) statutes.** Superseded statutes are available in the Legislative Office Building Library, Supreme Court Library, State Library, and law school libraries. Current statutes are available in many law and public libraries, through paid online services, and on the Internet. See the General Assembly's web page at <http://www.ncleg.net/Statutes/Statutes.html>. The print version has editorial notes and other helpful material not in the web version.
3. **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 the statutes.

4. **Read each session law to see if it affects the language you're researching. The bill number is set out in the heading of the session law.** Check each change listed in the statute's notes until you find the one you are researching. Session laws are available in the Legislative Library, Supreme Court Library, State Library, and law school libraries. Session laws for certain years (local laws from 1963 forward; public laws beginning in 1983) are available on the General Assembly's web page: See <http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/EnactedLegislation/ELTOC.pl?sType=Law>.

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

5. **With the bill number, you can compile the chronological bill history.** Bill histories are online from 1985 to date. Check the Internet first; then ask us about the in-house Bill Status system. For pre-1985 bills, use the indexes to the House and Senate Journals. The Journal indexes 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 indexes show a companion bill, take the same steps for the companion bill. [The library has some useful computer printouts beginning with 1973, so ask for help with bill histories during the 70s and early 80s.]
6. **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, and whether it was recommended by an agency or other entity. Check for a fiscal or actuarial note. The Legislative Library has bill books from 1985 forward in the LB Library and from 2003 forward in the LOB Library. Earlier bills are on microfilm. (Bills are filmed on an ongoing basis, so these dates will change.)
7. **Identify the committees that considered the bill and review their minutes.** Using the bill history from Step 6, review the minutes from the standing committee(s) which considered the bill. These are summary minutes only and are found in notebooks in the LB Library from 1997 forward or on microfilm in the LOB Library from 1973-1996. (Minutes are filmed on an ongoing basis, so these dates will change.) Look for bill analyses and explanatory memoranda by legislative analysts here.
8. **Determine whether the bill originated in a study or another interim committee.** If a non-standing committee recommended the bill, a study report or study committee minutes may be available. (You may discover this from the drafting code in the bill's caption, the long title of the bill, session law indexes, or another reference source). Some study committee minutes are available in the Legislative Library in hard copy or microfilm, beginning in the late 1960s. Lists of legislative study reports held by the Legislative Library are found on the General Assembly web page: <http://www.ncleg.net/LegLibrary/studies/studies.html>. If the General Statutes Commission recommended the bill, General Statutes Commission

memoranda or other research resources may be available from the General Statutes Commission. (The Legislative Library and Supreme Court Library have limited portions of GSC resources).

9. **Senate floor debate and summaries of legislation may be available.**  
Floor debate is recorded on CDs in the Senate and is transferred to the State Archives following session. Debate is not recorded in the House. The Institute of Government provides bill digests in its Daily Bulletin series. The Research Division publishes post-session **Summaries of Substantive Ratified Legislation**, which are available at the Legislative Library or online. <http://www.ncleg.net/gascrpts/DocumentSites/browseDocSite.asp?nID=1&sFolderName=\Research%20Division\Summaries%20of%20Substantive%20Ratified%20Legislation>

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\* See the North Carolina Supreme Court Library's extensive review of state and federal legislative history research and resources, see [NC Legislative History Guide - NC Supreme Court Library](#), two research documents published by the UNC CH Law Library, [NC Legislative History Guide - UNC-CH Law Library](#) and [Finding Federal and North Carolina Legislative History on the Web](#), and a publication of the Wake Forest Professional Center Library <http://web.law.wfu.edu/pclguides/NCLegisHistory.pdf>

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