

Beginning Legislative Research: Public Law and Bill Numbers

The first step for a researcher looking for a legislative history is always the same: find the numbers assigned to the bill and the public law (if the bill actually became a law; most don't). Almost every resource available for legislative research indexes the information by bill number and/or public law number. Legislative history research is much easier armed with these numbers.

STEP ONE: FIND THE PUBLIC LAW NUMBER (example: Pub. L. 106-43)

1. *U.S. Code/U.S. Code Annotated/U.S. Code Service.*

If you are working from a particular code section, for instance, 15 U.S.C. 1052, look for the parenthetical blurb immediately following the text of the section. This is the statutory history of the section; it tells you how and when the section originated and how and when it was amended, if at all. It will include the public law numbers for legislation that created this code section.

The citation that appears in the example, Pub. L. 106-43, §2(a), 113 Stat. 218, tells you that the text of a 1999 public law that amended 15 U.S.C. 1052 is in volume 113 of *Statutes at Large* on page 218. (For older laws, you may find reference to a chapter number instead of a public law. They are also printed in *Statutes at Large*.)

If there are further public law citations, this means that the original law was amended by subsequent legislation; you may want to track that legislative history if you are interested in language from the amendment. (Don't forget to check any supplements for additional statutory history.)

2. *HeinOnline*, 1789- and *LexisNexis Congressional*, 1970-.

If you have only subject information about an act, or the title or popular name of an act, you may use *HeinOnline* to find P.L. (or Chapter) and bill number information. Select U.S. Statutes at Large, then the Search tab. Use their examples to develop your search. Or use *LexisNexis Congressional*. Select Legislative Histories, Bill & Laws (sidebar) and the Keyword Search tab, then do a search within Public Laws.

3. *Popular Names Tables.*

If you have only the popular name of an act, use the Popular Names Table in any of the *U.S. Code* sets or *Shepard's Acts and Cases by Popular Name*, Reserve KF 80 .S54, to find the public law or chapter number and relevant *U.S. Code* citations.

STEP TWO: FIND THE BILL NUMBER (examples: S. 648 or H.R. 1935)

1. *Statutes at Large*, 2nd Floor, Stacks 202-203 (1789-); *HeinOnline*, U.S. Statutes at Large (1789-); *LexisNexis Congressional* (Congressional Publications > Search by Number tab > Find congressional publications related to a bill or law (drop-down menu) (1903-); *Westlaw* (USCCAN-PL, 1973-), (US-STATLRG, 1789-1972). Use the public law or chapter number you found to look up the public law (go back to the first page of the act if the Stat. citation has placed you in the middle). Note the bill number in brackets in the margin or in the heading.

2. *See #2 above.*

3. *Legislative Reference Checklist*, 1789-1903, Reserve KF 49 .L43 1982; *HeinOnline*, U.S. Federal Legislative History Library, Title Collection.

Look up a public law or chapter number in the chart and find the corresponding bill number.

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