



## N.C. Legislative History

This guide outlines some of the most important sources of information about North Carolina legislation and the legislative process, covering available materials from the period of 1789 to the present. A section at the end of this guide addresses research regarding prestatehood legislative materials. The guide covers the following:

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### A Note About Document Availability

Most of the titles listed below are available online or at UNC libraries. For titles available in print, library call numbers point to UNC Libraries' holdings. Some titles--especially older works--are only available at the [Legislative Library](#) in Raleigh.

**Finding documents online:** If you already know what documents you need to retrieve and are looking for an online source, the following websites have the most comprehensive collections of digitized primary materials (these sites are reviewed in more detail in the guide below):

- | [North Carolina General Assembly website](#)
- | [North Carolina Legislative Library website](#)
- | [North Carolina State Government Publications Collection](#) (a joint effort of UNC libraries, East Carolina University, and the State Library of NC)

### Background Information

The following titles provide background information on the legislature and the law making process in North Carolina.

*The General Assembly of North Carolina: A Handbook for Legislators* ([KFN7821.G46 1997](#), 1st floor, Law Library Stacks) includes a chapter that details the steps by which an introduced bill becomes enacted law in North Carolina. This source also contains the rules and procedures of the state Senate and House of Representatives, as well as bibliographic references to other pertinent sources.

*Article II: Guide to the North Carolina Legislature* ([JK4130 .A78](#), 1983-2006 in Law Library Stacks; latest edition available online from the [North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research](#)) contains snapshot information about members of both the state Senate and House of Representatives including biographical information, party affiliation, contact information, committee assignments and voting records. Each guide covers a specific legislative session.

*North Carolina Manual* ([JK4130 .N673](#) , 1917–2007/08 editions in 3rd floor Law Library Stacks; full-text scans of the 1917–2003/04 editions available through [Internet Archive](#); 2009/10 edition available online at the [N.C. Secretary of State's website](#)) published biennially, contains historical data about North Carolina; biographical information about legislators; information about state agencies, the judiciary, and county officials; election statistics; and other facts of general interest.

*State Legislative Leadership, Committees, and Staff* ([JK2403 .B62](#), 1979-1995, 3rd floor Law Library Stacks) contains information on committee objectives, committee leadership, and the individuals associated at the various levels of the legislative structure in each state, including North Carolina.

*The General Assembly of North Carolina: "How an Idea Becomes Law"* is a step-by-step guide that outlines the process by which a Bill becomes a law. Available online at the [General Assembly of North Carolina](#) website.

## Finding Session Laws and Codifications

After the General Assembly passes a bill and it is ratified, it becomes a session law. In North Carolina, session laws are categorized as "public" laws with general applicability or "private" laws. The State Constitution also distinguishes laws of local applicability (a law that applies to fewer than 15 counties), which the Governor need not sign for it to become law. Public laws that are currently in force are codified in a compilation known as the general statutes, arranged by subject.

*North Carolina Session Laws* ([KFN7425 .A22](#), 1943–2011 in 4th floor Law Library North Carolina Reference Collection, 1784–2011 in 3rd floor Law Library Rare Books Room) the official compilation of North Carolina session laws, organized by the year and order in which the law was passed. This compilation is available online in several places:

- 1 1817-2011 are available at [NC State Government Publications Collection](#)
- 1 1776-present are available through [HeinOnline](#) (accessible to the UNC community and through terminals on campus)
- 1 1959-present (local laws) and 1983/1984-present (general laws) through the [General Assembly of North Carolina](#) website.

*General Statutes of North Carolina Annotated* ([KFN7430 1943 .A24](#), 4th floor Law Library Reference Desk and Reference Collection; back copies in 2nd floor Law Library Stacks; also available through Lexis Advance to law school community) is the official North Carolina subject compilation, published by Lexis. Each section contains history notes which indicate session law number, the date of initial passage, as well as any subsequent amendments for the statute. It also contains annotations about cases that have interpreted a statute. Alternative versions are available in print and online:

- 1 *West's North Carolina General Statutes Annotated* ([KFN7430 1943 .A241](#), 4th floor Reference Collection, back copies in 2nd Floor Law Library Stacks; also available online through WestLaw Next to the law school community) is an unofficial annotated version of the general statutes offered by West publishing.
- 1 *North Carolina General Statutes* (current, unofficial and unannotated), available through the [North Carolina General Assembly website](#).

For legislative history research, most background information, such as committee hearings or House or Senate debate, reference the original bill number. If you are starting with a statute codified in the North Carolina General Statutes, use the history notes to determine the session law number. The session law will reference the original bill number.

## Finding and Tracking Bills

With a session law and bill number in hand, finding the original bill and subsequent versions of the bill--and the committees and legislative bodies that considered the bill--will help in understanding the process and reasoning behind changes in the text of the bill. In general, copies of various versions of a given bill will be available at:

- 1 [The North Carolina General Assembly website, Legislation section](#) , which has an index and lookup tool for bills dating back to the 1985-1986 session
- 1 [The UNC School of Government Library Legislative Archive](#) (in print), which holds print copies of all versions of bills introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly since 1939
- 1 [North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, UNC Chapel Hill](#) (in print), which holds scattered versions of bills, from 1858 to 1999 (somewhat difficult to search; we suggest contacting the North Carolina Collection directly for assistance)

Tacking the bill as it was considered by various committees other groups will help give a sense of other places to look for information about how the bill was developed. The following sources are useful for bill tracking:

- 1 *Daily Bulletin* ([KFN7407 .D24](#), Law Library Rare Books Room, ask for assistance at Reference Desk; the law school

community has [online access](#), password available at <https://my.law.unc.edu/library/>) is a digest of actions by the North Carolina General Assembly. While current editions of the *Daily Bulletin* are collected in the Davis Library Reference area and in the School of Government Library, the Law Library's collection is limited to 1939, 1945-1956, 1957-1962 & 1965-1994. For bills from January 1995 to 2005, consult the *Weekly Bulletin*, described below.

- 1 ***Weekly Bulletin*** ([KFN7407 .D25](#), 1st Floor Law Library Stacks) was published weekly during the sessions of the North Carolina General Assembly from 1995 to 2005, and gives summaries and calendar actions for each bill being considered by the state legislature.
- 1 ***Ratified Bills*** (Held in Reserve Room, ask for assistance at Circulation or Reference Desk, also searchable on the [General Assembly of North Carolina website](#)) is a collection of final versions of bills in North Carolina, passed by both houses of the legislature and assigned a chapter number. The Law Library receives these within a few days of passage. The ratified bill shows additions and deletions made to the language and is helpful in understanding the history of the bill.
- 1 ***Summaries of Substantive Ratified Legislation*** ([KFN7411.62 .L46 S85](#), 3rd floor Law Library Rare Book Room, ask for assistance at Reference Desk; also available for the years 1989-2012 through the [General Assembly of North Carolina website](#) and (for 1999-2012) through the [North Carolina State Government Publications Collection](#)) summarizes substantive bills passed during legislative sessions, organized by subject. The Law Library has issues from the 1989-2009 sessions; the School of Government library has issues from the 1989-2012 sessions.

For current bill status information you can call the Legislative library at 919-733-7778.

## House and Senate Journals

Although not a verbatim account of all that transpires in each house of the legislature, these journals can be useful for constructing a bill history.

***Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina*** ([KFN7418 .H68](#), 2nd Floor Law Library Stacks, 1860-present; House and Senate Journals, 1822-present are available online through the [North Carolina State Government Publications Collection](#); 2001-present available online through the [North Carolina General Assembly website](#)).

Online audio access to current session activity of the North Carolina House of Representatives and Senate is provided through the [General Assembly's website](#). Audio access to past House chamber audio is also available for [past sessions](#), beginning with January 2009.

***Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina*** ([KFN7418 .S46](#), 2nd Floor Law Library Stacks, 1858 to present; House and Senate Journals, 1822-present are available online through the [North Carolina State Government Publications Collection](#); 2001-present available online through the [General Assembly of North Carolina website](#) ).

Use the journals to trace a bill's process through the legislature. One can find the number of the bill, the date introduced, the name of the sponsor, the standing committee to which the bill was assigned, roll call votes on the bill and whether the bill was amended or a committee substitute was introduced.

The [School of Government Library Legislative Archive](#) has copies of bill histories available from 1973 to date. Using these may save extensive research time.

## Committee Deliberations

Records of committee deliberations can give some insight into the debates that influenced how a bill was formed. Starting in 1967, the Legislative Library has a near-complete collection of committee minutes available in print and microfilm. The record of those holdings is available [here](#).

In addition, some recent committee minutes can be accessed through the committee's own website. A list of committee websites can be found through [the North Carolina General Assembly website](#).

Researchers are reminded that the North Carolina Supreme Court has indicated that internal committee deliberations cannot be used to determine legislative intent. See *Electric Supply Co., v. Swain Electrical Co.*, 328 N.C. 651, 403 S.E.2d 291, 295 (1991).

## Study Reports

Various commissions and committees of the North Carolina General Assembly produce reports that often times lead to the creation or modification of a bill. These reports are often the most useful place to look when determining legislative intent; reports often explain the rationale behind the bill and outline what issues the bill was designed to address.

**Legislative Research Commission Study Reports** - Since 1965, the commission has conducted studies on issues to be legislated. Study Reports are reports on studies and investigations the Commission has conducted regarding governmental agencies, institutions, and matters of public policy. The Commission does not publish Study Reports for every piece of legislation, but if one is available, it may be the most useful source for determining the intent of the legislation. To find commission reports, search:

- 1 **North Carolina Legislative Research Commission Reports** (KFN7411.62 .L45, 3rd floor Law Library Rare Books Room, ask for assistance at the reference desk). The law library holds select reports, and the School of Government Library and the North Carolina Collection have more extensive holdings. To locate individual reports, search the UNC Libraries catalog with keywords "North Carolina General Assembly" and "Legislative Research Commission"
- 1 **Legislative Research Commission Activities** (KFN7411.62.L45 S85, 1981-2000 at UNC School of Government Library; scattered reports 1983 through 2012 available online at the [North Carolina General Assembly website](#)) reports on the research activities and study reports produced by the Legislative Research Commission.

**Other Study Reports** - Other commissions and committees also produce reports that are sometimes useful. To identify these reports, start by searching for the report title in

- 1 **Legislative Commissions and Non-Standing Committees and Interim Studies** ([KFN7411.62 L453 L43](#), 3rd floor Law Library Rare Books Room for 1987 to date, ask for assistance at the reference desk), which lists studies produced in the given year by the Legislative Research Commission and other commissions and committees. A online version of this publication is available through the [North Carolina General Assembly](#) for 1999 to 2012.

The [NC Legislative Library](#) provides access to many [reports](#) online. These include Study Reports, Research Division Reports, Bill Drafting Division Reports, and Fiscal Research Division Reports, as well as Tax and Finance Law Changes (1996-2012), Tax Summaries (1987-2004), and more. Although rare, some legislative committees make reports available directly through their websites. The full list of committee websites is available online through [the North Carolina General Assembly website](#).

## Other Sources and Guides

The [North Carolina Supreme Court Library](#) and the [North Carolina Legislative Library](#) both publish helpful legislative history guides.

**North Carolina Legal Research** [KFN7475 .C48 2010](#), 1st floor Law Library Stacks, also available at the Reference Desk) contains a section on North Carolina legislative history research, as well as general research strategies and guidelines.

**North Carolina Legal Research Guide** ([KFN7475 .M38](#), 4th floor Law Library Reference Collection) contains most of the legal and governmental information needed to research North Carolina law.

## Prestatehood and Early Statehood Legislative Materials

**North Carolina Colonial Session Laws** ([KFN7425 .A22](#), 1st floor Law Library Microfiche, available online to UNC community through [HeinOnline](#)) correspond to the North Carolina colonial and per-constitutional years of 1715 to 1788.

**North Carolina Colonial & State Records** [F251 .N6 1886](#), 3rd floor Law Library Rare Books room ask for assistance at the reference desk; online through [UNC Libraries](#)) a 26 volume set of original documents relating to legislative and executive actions from the earliest colonial records dating from 1622 to early statehood, up to 1790. The four volume index is the easiest way to search to set. The online UNC libraries version also allows for full-text searching.

**Public Documents of North Carolina** ([KFN7420 .N62](#), 1st floor Law Library, 1889-1909; 1831-1919 available online at [North Carolina State Government Publications Collection](#).) published from 1831 to 1919, each volume compiles executive and

legislative documents (annual and biennial reports, budget documents, addresses of governors to the General Assembly, reports of state institutions, and special committees' reports) produced for the year's session of the General Assembly.

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