The federal legislative process—what happens to a bill as it wends its way through Congress—is a complex process. Nevertheless, it is important to understand each step in the process in order to piece together the legislative history of a statute. The tabbed Legislative History–Federal page on Westlaw contains a graphical presentation of the congressional lawmaking process with links to useful databases. This quick reference guide shows you how to use this tabbed page to research the legislative history of a federal law.

Category:
Research Fundamentals

For research assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call the West Reference Attorneys at 1-800-850-WEST (1-800-850-9378) or click Help on Westlaw® for a live help session.

Using the Westlaw Research Pyramid

Statutes are the second category of primary legal sources.

Statutes on Westlaw are annotated to help you find relevant case law that interprets or applies the statutes.
Congressional Lawmaking Process Databases

The names and identifiers of selected databases pertinent to each step in the lawmaking process are listed below.

1. Preliminary congressional inquiry—hearings
   - Congressional Testimony (CONGTMY)
   - U.S. Congressional Testimony (USTESTIMONY)
   - U.S. Political Transcripts (USPOLTRANS)

2. Executive initiative—presidential message
   - Daily Presidential Documents (PRES-DAILY)
   - Presidential Documents (PRES)
   - U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News*—Executive Orders (USCCAN-EO)

3. Bill introduced in House and/or Senate
   - Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   - Congressional Bills (CONG-BILLTXT)

4. Bill referred to committee
   - Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   - Congressional Record (CR)
   - U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN)

5. Committee hearings on bill, including testimony by witness
   - Congressional Testimony (CONGTMY)
   - U.S. Congressional Testimony (USTESTIMONY)

6. Bill reported out
   - Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   - Legislative History (LEGHIST)
   - U.S. Congress
1. Legislative debate on bill
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Legislative History–U.S. Code, 1948 to Present (LH)
   U.S. Congressional Testimony (USTESTIMONY)

2. Law is codified if it has general and permanent applicability
   United States Code Annotated® (USCA)
   USCA® Popular Name Table (USCA-POP)
   United States Code Annotated–Tables (USCA-TABLES)

3. President signs bill and it becomes law
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Legislative History–U.S. Code, 1948 to Present (LH)
   U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News
   –Public Laws (USCCAN-PL)

4. Bill referred to conference committee if House and Senate versions differ
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Legislative History–U.S. Code, 1948 to Present (LH)
   U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News
   –Legislative History Table (USCCAN-TABLE)

5. Bill passed by both houses ("engrossed")
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Congressional Bills (CONG-BILLTXT)
   U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News
   –Public Laws (USCCAN-PL)

6. Law is codified if it has general and permanent applicability
   United States Code Annotated® (USCA)
   USCA® Popular Name Table (USCA-POP)
   United States Code Annotated–Tables (USCA-TABLES)

7. Legislative debate on bill
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Congressional Record (CR)
   U.S. Congressional Testimony (USTESTIMONY)

8. Bill passed ("engrossed"); if passed in only one chamber, bill is introduced in the other and process is repeated.
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Legislative History–U.S. Code, 1948 to Present (LH)
   U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN)

9. Bill referred to conference committee if House and Senate versions differ
   Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
   Legislative History–U.S. Code, 1948 to Present (LH)
   U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News
   –Legislative History Table (USCCAN-TABLE)

10. Bill passed by both houses ("engrossed")
    Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
    Congressional Bills (CONG-BILLTXT)
    U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News
    –Public Laws (USCCAN-PL)

11. President signs bill and it becomes law
    Bill Tracking–Federal–Summaries and Status (US-BILLTRK)
    Legislative History–U.S. Code, 1948 to Present (LH)
    U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News
    –Public Laws (USCCAN-PL)

12. Law is codified if it has general and permanent applicability
    United States Code Annotated® (USCA)
    USCA® Popular Name Table (USCA-POP)
    United States Code Annotated–Tables (USCA-TABLES)