



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY

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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 information is available on the [General Assembly website](#), the [Legislative Library's website](#) or the [Library's Legislative History page](#).

The Library staff will assist patrons with their research, but services do not include compiling legislative histories. For directions, hours and other information, read [About Us](#).

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Before beginning your research, review [How an Idea Becomes a Law in North Carolina](#).

Also helpful:

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

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

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

1. **To find the bill number**, start with the [NCGA Legislation page](#), which has tips and resources for finding bills. You can also find bill numbers using House or Senate journals ([online at State Library](#)) or session laws from 1959 ([online here](#)) and older ones ([online here](#)). 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](#) (read caveats carefully) or in print at many law and public libraries. The print version is the *official* version and contains editorial notes, case annotations, 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 **If your section isn't in the current statutes, check the out-of-date (superseded) statutes.** Superseded statutes are available in the Legislative Library, the Supreme Court Library, the State Library, and law school libraries.
4. **After finding the statute section, locate the history note following 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.** Check the [Legislative Publications session law page](#) for links to digitized editions beginning in 1777. Printed volumes are available in the Legislative Library, the Supreme Court Library, the State Library, and law school libraries.
6. **Read each session law to see if it affects the language you're researching.** Check each change listed in the statute's 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. Computer printouts for bills from 1973–1984 sessions have been scanned and made [available online](#). Use the [Legislative Library Documents Locator](#) to locate print and filmed bill histories. For earlier sessions, use the House and Senate Journals ([online at State Library](#)) 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.
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 chronological bill history from Step 7, review the minutes from the standing committee(s) which considered the bill. Use the [Legislative Library Committee Minutes](#) page to locate minutes. These are summary minutes only (not verbatim or transcribed), but you may find bill analyses and explanatory memoranda by legislative analysts here.
10. **Determine whether the bill originated in a study or other interim committee.** If a non-standing (study) committee recommended the bill, look for a study report or for study committee minutes. The drafting code in the bill's caption, the long title of the bill, session law indexes, or another reference source can indicate if a study was done. Identify online reports and older reports in the Legislative Library using the [Legislative Library Study Reports](#) page or [Legislative Publications](#) page. 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 these minutes. If the General Statutes Commission recommended the bill, check with a librarian for General Statutes Commission memoranda or other research resources available.
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 through the State Archives for 1965-1967, 1975 and 2003 forward (CDs). Senate audio 1977-1978 (legislative days 79-113, 116-126, and 128-136) and 2005-2012 has been [digitized](#) by the State Library. Contact the Senate Principal Clerk's Office for the current session recording. The House chamber audio archive is [online](#) beginning with the 2009 session.
12. **Summaries of legislation.** The General Assembly's Research Division publishes the post-session [Summaries of Substantive Ratified Legislation](#). The [UNC School of Government](#) provides bill digests in its [Daily Bulletin series \(by subscription\)](#) and offers [post-legislative summaries](#) online and in print.