

Legislative history encompasses the tracking of the history of a bill as well as additional research done to analyze the intent of legislators when they submitted, discussed, passed, or rejected a bill. Reports and recommendations from agencies, committees, or commissions as well as debates preceding the enactment of a bill into law are important to determine legislative intent. Such history becomes crucial when the meaning of a law is challenged in court and clarification is required.

Resources at the Library of Virginia

Bills

The various versions of a bill delineate the changes in its text over time and may be helpful in determining intent. A bill always mentions the section of the *Code of Virginia* that it will amend. The regular print of the text indicates existing legislation, text in italics indicates amendments to the current law, and text with a line through it indicates deletions.

The history of a bill (1994–) can be tracked via the [Legislative Information System](#). It provides the status of bills and related information such as a summary of the bill, names of patrons, reading dates, vote counts, amendments, and committee referrals. This information can also be found in the House and Senate calendars.

House and Senate Calendars

The calendars are published daily when the General Assembly is in session and provide a detailed account of pending legislation including amendments passed, recommendations or veto justifications of the governor, and votes for bills reported out of committee.

House and Senate Journals

The journals incorporate information from the calendars and the minutes of each daily session and provide a detailed account of floor activities, including roll call votes.

Acts of Assembly

Bills enacted into law each legislative session become chapters that constitute the Acts of Assembly for each year. Each chapter refers to the Senate or House bill that created it. This information is helpful for further research using the House and Senate journals or calendars.

Code of Virginia

Each year the bills that have become law are integrated (codified) into the *Code of Virginia*. Every section of the *Code* refers to the chapter or chapters and year of enactment of that particular law. Look for the information in parentheses at the end of each section, which states the chapters that created or amended it. For example, this citation—Code 1950, § 58-27.2; 1970, c. 762; 1973, c.140; 1978, c.654; 1984, c.675—means that part of the section predates the current *Code of Virginia*, that it was incorporated in the 1950 version, and that there were changes to the law in 1970, 1973, 1978, and 1984.

House and Senate Documents

The documents include reports and recommendations by various agencies, committees, and commissions on topics of pending legislation. They are indexed from 1897 to present on the [Legislative Information System](#) with the full text of documents available in PDF format for more recent years. These print indexes are also available:

- *A Cumulative Index to the Numbered Documents of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1918–1976.*
- *Topical Studies by the General Assembly of Virginia during the Period . . .* (coverage: 1970–)

Newspapers

At times, newspapers provide in-depth articles on specific bills. The Library has online access to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (1903–), which routinely reports on the actions of the General Assembly.

Opinions of the Attorney General

On a given topic, the published opinions of the attorney general may be helpful to determine intent. Opinions (1996–) are available online. Earlier years are available in print.

Law Journals

Law review articles often present analysis and discuss intent of specific laws. These Virginia law reviews may be helpful.

- *George Mason Law Review*
- *University of Richmond Law Review*
- *Virginia Law Review*
- *Washington and Lee Law Review*
- *William and Mary Law Review*

Archival Material

The Library has enrolled bills (1776–) that are original documents signed by the Speaker of the House, the president of the Senate, and, starting in 1870, by the governor. The Library's collections also include the official correspondence of Virginia's governors (1776–).

Additional Resources

Legislative Draft Files

The Division of Legislative Services creates a legislative draft file for each bill. The file contains the bill request, background information justifying the proposal of the bill, copies with the drafting changes, and any correspondence between the drafting attorney and the legislator. These files (1962–) are in the custody of the Legislative Reference Center of the Division of Legislative Services. In the past, files created after 1989 were open to the public if the legislation was enacted. Effective July 1, 2017, the *Code of Virginia* (30-28.18 [B]) was amended to state that legislative draft files are the property of the owner and are to be released only with the specific approval of the owner. To obtain the contents of a legislative draft file, email your request (including *Code* section, bill number, chapter number, and year) to Theresa Schmid at tschmid@dls.virginia.gov. A "request for release" form will be sent to the owner of the draft file and the Division of Legislative Services will inform you if the owner has granted permission to release the file. If the owner is deceased, the file is retained by the Division of Legislative Services. To access the file, the requestor must obtain permission from the owner's next of kin.

Committee Hearings

Beginning with the 2018 session, live and archived video streams are available for all House and Senate full committee meetings. The videos can be accessed from the General Assembly's website.

Floor Sessions

Beginning in 2017, the General Assembly's website provides access to video of the House and Senate floor sessions. Earlier House and Senate floor sessions were recorded on videotape beginning in 1982. The Library of Virginia has video recordings of the Virginia House of Delegates floor sessions for 1982–2013 (accession 50627). No video recordings of Senate floor sessions prior to 2017 are available. The House of Delegates recordings can be viewed in the Library of Virginia's Archives Reading Room. Call ahead to confirm holdings (804.692.3888). Some of the videotapes are available for viewing or purchase through the Clerk's Office of each house.

Fiscal Impact Statements

Occasionally bills require a fiscal impact statement. These statements are usually prepared by the Department of Planning and Budget and contain anticipated costs of the proposed legislation. Those published in 1979 or later can be accessed via the [Legislative Information System](#). Earlier years may be available through the Legislative Reference Center or the House or Senate Clerk's Office.

Legislative Reference Center: 804.698.1889

House Clerk's Office: 804.698.1619

Senate Clerk's Office: 804.698.7400

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