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Law Library Briefs

Roger Williams University School of Law Library



No. 19, February, 2005

Researching State Legislation

For those who are researching current state legislation, LexisNexis and Westlaw have several databases for locating summary or the full text of a bill and information on the status of that bill. In addition, individual state government websites offer free access to their legislative materials.

Unlike the U.S. Congress, most state legislatures do not generate documents such as committee reports or hearing transcripts during their deliberation on proposed legislation. Searching for articles in periodicals such as bar association journals, law reviews, magazines, and newspapers may yield some background information on your legislation.

If you do not know where to begin your research, there are reference materials to consult which provide information on legislative research for your state. William H. Manz's *Guide to State Legislative and Administrative Materials* (Reference, KF1 .G8 1988 - . Biennial) lists state legislative documents, the means for locating them, and contact information. In addition to the Manz's *Guide*, there are several state legal

research manuals and bibliographies of state government materials. Search the Law Library's WebCatalog to determine if there is a legal research manual for your state in the Law Library's collection. Many academic law libraries have research guides on their websites which may include state legislative research. For Rhode Island documents, see *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations: Survey of State Documents and Law-Related Materials*, recently revised by Gail Winson. It is available from the Law Library's "Research Guides" webpage. You can also contact the state's legislative library or state law library to see what materials are available. Contacting the sponsor(s) of a the bill may yield additional information.

🔍 To read the full text or a summary of a bill:

❖ Using LexisNexis to conduct a search of all fifty states, the path is **Legal > States Legal - U.S.> Combined States > Bill Text**. For individual states, the path is **Legal > States Legal - U.S.> [your state] > Legislation & Politics > Full-Text Bills or Bill Tracking and Full-Text Bills**.

❖ Using Westlaw, the database Bills - All States (**ST-BILLS**) combines full text and summaries while the database Bill Text - All States (**ST-BILLTXT**) contains the full text. When searching an individual state, use the state's postal abbreviation followed by **-BILLS** or **BILLTXT** (e.g. **RI-BILLS** or **RI-BILLTXT**).

🔍 To locate information on the status of a bill:

❖ Using LexisNexis to search all fifty states, the path is **Legal > States Legal - U.S.> Combined States > Bill Text**. For individual states, the path is **Legal > States Legal - U.S.> [your state] > Legislation & Politics > Bill Tracking and Full-Text Bills or Bill Tracking Reports**.

❖ Using Westlaw, the database Bill Tracking - All States (**ST-BILLTRK**) tracks the status of legislation in all fifty states. When searching an individual state, use the state's postal abbreviation followed by **-BILLTRK** (e.g. **RI-BILLTRK**).

🔍 To read the text of a recently enacted law (often referred to as a slip law):

• Using LexisNexis for individual states, the path is **Legal > States Legal - U.S.> [your state] > Legislation & Politics > Advance Legislative Service.**

• Using Westlaw, when searching an individual state, use the state's postal abbreviation followed by - **LEGIS** (e.g. **RI-LEGIS**).

*When using Westlaw, you can either type in the database identifier (e.g. **RI-LEGIS**) in the "Search these databases" box on the main research page or from the Westlaw Directory select the database from the "Statutes and Legislative Materials" menu for your state.

To locate an individual state's government website to read the text of proposed legislation, you can use one of several directories on the Internet. These directories provide direct links to various state government websites. Two excellent directories are provided by the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Library of Congress. You can access these directories and other directories from the Law Library's Research Links page under the heading "State and Municipal Materials."



MICROFORMS!

Many valuable items in the Law Library's collection are on microfiche and microfilm. Whether an item is available on microform is indicated by the description of

that item in the Law Library's WebCatalog and in the location information. There are signs in the Micrographics Room indicating some of the major microform collections. For more information on the collections in the Micrographics Room, consult the *Microform Guide*. The *Guide* is located in the Micrographics Room, on reserve and at the Library's website in .pdf format (<http://law.rwu.edu/Law+Library/Research+Guides.htm>).

Beginning with this issue of *Law Library Briefs*, there will be a series of articles highlighting the Law Library's various microform collections.

Legal Periodicals in Microforms

As you know, print editions of law reviews, bar journals and other legal periodicals are shelved in alphabetical order in the Periodical Stacks. If an early volume of a legal periodical is not on the shelf, be sure to check the Law Library's WebCatalog to determine if it is available on microfilm or microfiche. For each legal periodical on microform, the WebCatalog indicates the volume holdings, the format, and the latest volume received. Also on microfiche is the bar journal for each state's bar association and back issues of the *National Law Journal* and the *New York Law Journal*.



WEBLOGS!

Are you a legal news junkie? If so,

you may be interested in reading legal weblogs. BLAWG (<http://www.blawg.org>) is a directory with links to law and legal related weblogs. This directory is organized by type of blogger, jurisdiction, branch of government, and subject area.

Some noteworthy weblogs include: *JURIST - Legal News and Research* (<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase>) maintained by law students led by Professor Bernard J. Hibbitts at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. Law Librarian Sabrina Pacifici's weblog *beSpacific* (<http://www.bespacific.com>) focuses on news about law and technology. *Law.com - Blog Network* (http://legalblogwatch.typepad.com/legal_blog_watch) has law professors and practitioners blogging on various legal subjects.

Among the bloggers of *Law Professors Blogs* (<http://www.lawprofessorblogs.com>) is R.W.U. School of Law Dean of Students and Director of Academic Support Program Dennis Tonsing! Along with Quinnipiac University School of Law Professor Richard Litwin, Dean Tonsing posts various items on the subject of Law School Academic Support.

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