Legislative History Research: Using ProQuest

In the last tutorial, you learned how to use Congress.gov to find legislative history documents using Public Law numbers.

In this tutorial, you will learn how to use the tools at ProQuest Congressional and ProQuest Legislative Insight to do the same thing.

While Congress.gov is free to use, ProQuest tools are costly – but they also come with some enhanced features to help you research.

ProQuest Congressional has legislative history documents for all laws from the 91st Congress (1969) through the present, and for some laws before then, which gives it greater coverage than Congress.gov. It also has some compiled legislative histories.

ProQuest Legislative Insight has more than 18,000 compiled legislative histories covering laws from 1789 to the present. It only covers bills that have been passed into law.

In a compiled legislative history, all of the documents associated with a law are listed or reprinted. As before, we are going to find the legislative history for Senate Bill 1124 from the 104th Congress using ProQuest Congressional and ProQuest Legislative Insight.

To start researching using ProQuest Congressional, simply search for the database on the library’s homepage. You will see that there are a number of ProQuest databases. Select Congressional.

Using the Bill number to find the legislative history you want is much more valuable than trying to run a keyword search. A keyword search will get you a lot of irrelevant results. One way to start is by using the Advanced Search screen, found under “Legislative & Executive Publications.” To locate the legislative history for Senate Bill 1124 in the 104th Congress, conduct the following search:

- Enter the bill number
- Select only the Legislative History box
- Select the appropriate Congress

The Senate Bill impacted two enacted Public Laws. In this case, we want to take a look at the legislative history of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Here is the compiled Legislative History, providing links to all of the text of the Bills, hearings, committee prints, and other documents. Navigate through the documents by using the menu on the left.

You can also search for a bill by number, depending on the information you have. Searching by the Bill or Public Law number is much more specific than searching via the Code section, since the Code section may be made up of a number of different Bills.

Notice that the results here are more than just the legislative history. They also include the individual documents related to the Bill. You can filter by document type to select only the legislative history.

To use ProQuest Legislative Insight, you can either select it from the database page in the catalog as we did with Congressional, or you can use this link from Congressional.

Before you begin searching, here are a few additional features of Legislative Insight:
• The Historical Context button gives you a thumbnail sketch of what was happening in society and politics during each Congressional session.
• The sidebar on the left shows you the available compiled legislative histories per Congress, giving you an idea of the coverage available.
• The Legislative Process tool shows you how the Bill progressed and can help you quickly identify various documents.

To easily find a compiled legislative history, enter the citation information you have into the appropriate citation checker box. Your entry will be cross-referenced with other document types as you go, so type slowly.

The resulting compiled legislative history is extensively annotated and organized. You can also use this tool to search within the text of the documents in the compiled legislative history.

If you have any questions, please consult a librarian.