Case Law Research: Using Annotated Codes to Find Cases

Finding cases that interpret a statute is relatively easy because of annotated statutes and codes. Wherever possible, researchers use an annotated code or statute because it contains not just the text of the law, but also tools to facilitate research. These tools include annotations, or references to other information on the same topic. Annotations can be to other statutes, cases, administrative materials, and secondary sources.

If your legal issue is governed by a statute, then using the annotations to the statute are a fast and easy way to start your case research. To demonstrate this technique, let’s look at the Michigan code section that pertains to our problem, Michigan Compiled Laws § 445.774a.

In addition to the text of the code section, Westlaw also collects other sources that cite the code section. You can find cases in several places. Notes of Decisions are linked from the tab at the top. The cases are organized by topic.

If we click on the topic Geographic Area, Enforceability of Agreements, you can see the cases that discuss the reasonableness of the geographic limits.

Notes of Decisions collects the cases that significantly interpret the code section. You’ll find more cases under the Citing References tab. The cases listed here include those listed under Notes of Decisions and other cases that merely cite your code section.

If you have questions or require assistance, please contact a law librarian.