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Law Beyond Our Borders: Legal Resources from the Other 49 States

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Law Beyond Our Borders: Legal Resources from the Other 49 States

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Legal Resources from the Other 49 States

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I. Introduction

While there is some uniformity and predictability to what resources are available on the Web from the various agencies and branches of the federal government, much less comforting similarity exists for the resources provided by the various states. The universe of what is available is expanding, but there are still many gaps. In addition, many states have not yet stabilized their Web resources. They keep reorganizing or changing what they offer, usually changing Web addresses at the same time. Often this means that what you found last month is no longer available, or is at least no longer available at the address you book marked. Still, in most instances, today you can find the current code, without annotations, and at least a few judicial opinions. Often a much greater extent and variety of resources are available.

In the sections that follow, I will try to acknowledge the fact that your need for law from the other 49 might take a couple of forms. You could simply need to find a specific code section, judicial opinion, or administrative provision. To help you meet that sort of need, the next section of this paper will describe a number of sites that will get you to whatever law is available on the Web from each state. On the other hand, you might have a thorny and unsettled issue of Georgia law which makes you really want to see what other states have done with the same issue. To help you meet that need, the third section will list a number of resources that might make such comparison easier.

Finally, let me invite you to turn ahead in this collection of papers to my “Scoping Out Uncle Sam” piece. The very last section of that paper carries news of a project undertaken by Public Resource.Org to eventually create an electronic repository of all federal and state cases and codes. I included that in the paper on federal resources because the project will tackle

federal materials first, and it may be quite some time before any state materials are included in the repository. However, there is at least the prospect sometime in the future of a full, free electronic repository of state case law and current codes.

II. Sites to Help Find State Legal Materials on the Web

A. General Indexes, with Links to a Wide Variety of Materials

1. Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/states/index.html>

For each state, this site offers links to available sources for the state constitution and legislation, judicial opinions and court rules, regulations and other state agency information, and additional resources such as the state Bar Association, the Attorney General's office, law libraries, and the like.

2. FindLaw - State Resources

<http://www.findlaw.com/11stategov/index.html>

FindLaw links to a collection of resources from each state. In most instances, the links will include ones to cases, codes and regulations, courts, government information, and legal forms. For virtually every state, FindLaw provides directory information for lawyers in the state.

3. University of Michigan Documents Center - State Legal Resources on the Web

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/statelaw.html>

Folks at the Documents Center have created a handy, easy to read chart describing and linking to Web resources for all 50 states. Chart headings are: bills, sessions laws, code, constitution, new regulations and executive orders, codified regulations, AG opinions,

court opinions, newspapers, state law library, and election data. Where it is relevant, the entry gives dates of coverage.

B. Indexes with Links to State Courts and Related Resources

1. National Center for State Courts – State Court Web Sites

http://www.ncsconline.org/D_KIS/info_court_web_sites.html

The National Center for State Courts links to state trial and appellate courts from each of the 50 states. This page provides judicial branch links for each state, focusing on the administrative office of the courts, the court of last resort, any intermediate appellate courts, and each trial court level. To simplify finding court addresses, they have created new pages for some state trial courts to provide comprehensive contact information and are gradually adding links to specific district or courthouse Web sites on those pages rather than on the index page

2. State and Local Government on the Net - State Court Sites

<http://www.statelocalgov.net/50states-courts.cfm>

This directory of official state, county, and city government web sites includes a page featuring links to state judicial branches, and some individual courts.

3. Lexis One - Free Case Law

<http://www.lexisone.com/caselaw/freecaselaw>

Lexis offers free, sophisticated searching of all of the U.S. Supreme Court decisions from 1781, and the last five years of decisions from the U.S. Circuit courts and state courts.

You can search individual states or circuits or combine all circuits or all states. In addition to full text keyword searching, search by parties, judges, or counsel is also

allowed.

3. LLRX Court Rules, Forms and Dockets

<http://www.llrx.com/courtrules>

This site includes links to over 1,400 sources for state and federal court rules, forms and dockets. You can browse to find the resource you need, or search by keyword.

C. Indexes with Links to State Statutes and Legislative Information

1. Full-text State Statutes and Legislation on the Internet

<http://www.prairienet.org/~scruffy/f.htm>

This page seeks to link to sites containing full-text state constitutions, statutes, legislation (bills, amendments, etc.), session laws (bills that have become laws), and administrative rules of each of the states. It is maintained by an individual, but he or she does a very good job of keeping it up to date and accurate.

2. Justia - U.S. Laws, State and Local Governments

<http://law.justia.com/>

Based in the heart of Silicon Valley, Justia is a private group focused on making legal information, resources and services easy to find on the Internet. From this portion of their web site, you can find links to the constitutions and codes of each of the 50 states, as well as to a number of city and municipal codes.

3. State Legislative Presence on the Internet

<http://www.multistate.com/site.nsf/state?OpenPage>

Maintained by Multistate Associates Inc., this site provides a chart showing the main web page for each state and the web page for its legislature. Multistate Associates, Inc. is a

state and local government relations lobbying firm.

4. National Conference of State Legislatures

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>

The National Conference of State Legislatures is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. In this database, NCSL offers information gleaned from the home pages and web sites of the fifty state legislatures, the District of Columbia and the Territories. You can select to view specific website content materials (such as, bills, press rooms, statutes) from all states, one state or a selected list of states.

D. Indexes with Links to State Administrative Materials

1. National Association of Secretaries of State - Administrative Code and Registers Section

http://nass.org/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=262

Follow the “Internet Rules” link near the top of the page. There you will find a thorough resource that provides a table of each of the 50 states with links to: the state administrative agency responsible for promulgating rules and regulations, the state code of rules and regulations, the register of proposed rules and regulations, and guidance manuals for rule-making agencies if they exist on the Internet. This site is maintained by the Administrative Codes and Registers (ACR) Section of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS).

2. All Things Political - State Administrative Codes

http://www.allthingspolitical.org/state_government/state_admin_codes.htm

This is a quick and simple chart with a single link to the main page for the administrative code for each state. It is maintained by a group called Proquantum Corporation.

Although I know nothing about the group, the links I checked were up to date and accurate.

III. Sites to Help Make Comparisons Between the Laws of Various States

1. NCSL 50-State Legislative Tracking Web Resources

<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/lis/lrl/50statetracking.htm>

At the request of its Legislative Research Librarians (LRL) staff section, the National Conference of State Legislators has developed this resource. It is a collection of compilations of existing and proposed legislation from all 50 states on various issues. The broad topics covered are Agriculture and Rural Development; Arts and Culture; Banking, Insurance and Financial Services; Children and Families; Criminal Justice; Economic Development and Trade; Education; Elections; Energy and Electric Utilities; Environmental Protection: Ethics; Health; Human Services; Immigrants; Labor and Employment; Telecommunications and Information Policy; and Transportation. There are a number of specific issues covered within each topic.

2. National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws

<http://www.nccusl.org/Update/>

The Uniform Law Commission offers this web site that allows researchers to see the status of each of the commission's uniform laws in every state. To access the database follow the "Final Acts and Legislation" link from this page. For each uniform law, the

database offers a summary of the law, links to the final text of the law, a list of states that have adopted the law (follow the legislative fact sheet link), and bill tracking for states that have active legislative processes involving the law.

3. Cornell - Wex

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Category:Overview>

WEX, a product of the Legal Information Institute at the Cornell Law School, is a collaboratively-edited legal dictionary and encyclopedia. This category overview page shows 130 broad legal topics such as administrative law, adoption, bankruptcy, child custody, employment, land use, partnership, and torts. Each topic is linked to an overview of that area of the law. In the right hand margin of each overview about midway down, is a link to state statutes dealing with that area of the law. While this service necessarily treats the law with a pretty broad brush, it can be very useful to link easily to the portion of every state code that deals with the broad issue.

4. Harvard Law School Library - Multi State Legal Research

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/services/research/guides/grfs/state/state.php>

This is a research guide prepared by a librarian at the Harvard Law Library. It lists contact information for several organizations that work nationally on state law and policy issues; points to a number of print resources that include cross jurisdictional state information; and enumerates a number of specific legal topics on which a variety of groups have accumulated summaries of the law in the various states. When these summaries are available online, links appear in the text.

