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Wendy E. Moore

University of Georgia School of Law Library, wemoore@uga.edu

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Fantastic Facts about the 50 States: Websites for State Legal Research

Wendy E. Moore, M.S. in L.S.
Acquisitions Librarian
The University of Georgia School of Law
Alexander Campbell King Law Library
Athens, GA

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Introduction

Sometimes you need legal information from states other than Georgia. While you may feel comfortable knowing where to look for Georgia materials on the Internet, you may be less certain when information is needed concerning Florida, Tennessee, or even Nebraska. This paper is a survey of websites that will help you locate legal information and resources at the state level.

Websites for State Legal Research

The websites are grouped into types of resources that hopefully will make it easier for you to match a resource with your information need. For example, you may need to search case law from a particular state, or locate information from a state government agency, or, perhaps, verify ethics rules from another state bar. Each of these needs might be best met with different resources. While not all state legal information is available on the Internet, there is a significant and expanding amount of resources available to be utilized, if you know where to look.

State Government Resources & Portals

One way to approach looking for legal resources at the state level is to go directly to the official government website for the specific state of interest. Official state websites have stabilized in recent years and you can expect to find state legislative,

judicial, and administrative information. Arrangement of this information can vary between states, so you need to navigate the menu options carefully. Going directly to the official state website will help you quickly access current and authoritative information.

USA.gov – State Government

http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/State_and_Territories.shtml

The Federal government portal and search engine *USA.gov* offers an easy to access, up-to-date listing of official state websites. The list of states and territories can be found at this direct link, or you can navigate from the *USA.gov* homepage by looking under “Find Government Agencies.” There are also brief lists of “State and Territorial Contacts” and “State and Territorial Resources” which may be helpful, especially if you are looking for statistical information.

State-by-State Report on Authentication of Online Legal Resources

http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/State_and_Territories.shtml

Many states have ceased printing some of their publications and instead use the Internet to make available the official versions of state documents. In order to assist users of legal information to determine how trustworthy primary sources are on state websites, the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) produced the *State-by-State Report on Authentication of Online Legal Resources*. The comprehensive report examines survey information which investigated whether state governmental websites are actually official and capable of being considered authentic. The report was first published in

2007, with an update in 2009-10.

Google – U.S. Government Search

<http://www.google.com/unclesam>

Search engines have continued to become more and more sophisticated, but still sometimes it is difficult to sort out websites with quality primary legal sources from all the law firm, free legal advice, and blog websites. An easy way to utilize a search engine, but narrow your results to just government sponsored websites is to use *Google – U.S. Government Search*. Just add “unclesam” to the end of the normal Google URL, and it will take you to this search box. *Google - U.S. Government Search* does a specialized search that limits results to only U.S. federal, state and local government websites. A search from *Google - U.S. Government Search* provides more depth of coverage, than limiting your search to a specific domain such as .gov, since it also includes selected sites with .mil, .us, .edu, and even .com – as long as they are government sponsored websites. A quick search for “DUI Florida Code” returned relevant results from a variety of Florida governmental websites, but spared us the flashy firm websites from Tampa attorneys who specialize in DUI, which we would have gotten if we had just used basic *Google*.

GovEngine.com

<http://www.govengine.com/>

GovEngine.com is an easy to navigate government resources portal with an attractive, professional appearance. With over 17,000 links to Federal, state, and local government

websites, *GovEngine.com* states that it strives to get you to the specific website you need in three clicks. They break out ‘State Government’ and ‘State Courts’ into two separate sections. In their listings for each state they also offer links to relevant non-governmental resources, such as bar associations. The ‘Local Government’ section has separate alphabetical listings of both county and city websites.

State and Local Government on the Net

<http://www.statelocalgov.net/>

State and Local Government on the Net offers access to over 11,000 websites for of state government agencies and county/city governments. The website has a simple, easy to navigate arrangement, with links by state for both state governments and for local governments. There is also a section with topic pages containing links to these topical items for all 50 states, such as Aging, Military-Veterans, Tax Authorities, and Insurance. The great strength of this government resource portal is the depth of coverage it offers with links to local government websites.

GovSpot.com – State Government

<http://www.govspot.com/state/>

GovSpot.com is a commercial website produced by StartSpot Mediaworks Inc. It contains a wide assortment of links to government websites from municipalities to international organizations. The ‘State Government’ section can be accessed directly by using the link provided above. For each of the 50 states there is a separate page of links to not only government websites but also other resources that may be of interest, such as

news, tourism, landmarks, and libraries.

State Resources in Legal Portals

There are several well-known legal portals for accessing a broad array of legal resources on the Internet. Many of these legal portals have subsections that focus specifically on state legal and governmental information. These legal portals are good first places to start your research whether you are looking for primary law, agency information, or non-governmental legal information. This section features links to these specialized state information subsections, when available, rather than to the better known homepages for these websites.

Justia – US Law

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

Justia – US Law is a subsection of the large general legal portal *Justia*. At the *Justia – US Law* link listed above, you can access directly primary legal information for specific states. From the *Justia* homepage you can access the state law subsection under the “more” dropdown menu at the top of the page. *Justia* is an excellent legal portal and is a great place to start any search for freely available legal information.

LII – Law by Source: State

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

LII is a legal information portal maintained by the *Legal Information Institute* at the

Cornell Law School. The link above takes you directly to the *LII – Law by Source: State* listing of all 50 states. For each state there are links to legislative and court resources, as well as administrative codes and agency information. There are also links to other helpful resources such as state bar associations and ethics information. The *Legal Information Institute* is a non-profit and dedicated to the concept of free legal content on the web.

Findlaw – State Resources

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

Findlaw – State Resources is a subsection of the *Findlaw for Legal Professionals* < <http://lp.findlaw.com/> > website. Just a basic list of states, each link will take you to a summary of state legal information available on the *Findlaw* website. There are links to primary law, government information, forms, career sources, firms, practice support, and news media resources.

WashLaw Web – Legal Research on the Web

<http://www.washlaw.edu/>

Washlaw Web is a general legal portal with its information arranged alphabetically, by subject, and by geographic location. It is easy to access links to specific state legal resources directly from the homepage using their Google Maps links. All links on *WashLaw Web* are maintained by staff members of the Washburn University School of Law Library.

Public Library of Law - PLoL

[http:// www.plol.org/](http://www.plol.org/)

Created by *Fastcase*, the *Public Library of Law* is a resource for searching freely available law on the Internet. It provides a searchable interface to a large collection of primary law at both the state and federal levels. *PLoL* features cases from all 50 states back to 1997, as well as codes from all 50 states, regulations, court rules, and constitutions. *PLoL* requires registration before materials can be accessed. It also offers links to information on *Fastcase* that can be accessed through the State Bar of Georgia agreement with *Fastcase*.

Fastcase

<http://www.gabar.org/fastcase/>

Fastcase, a premium legal search service, is now freely available to members of the State Bar of Georgia as a benefit of membership. *Fastcase* includes primary law from all 50 states. You can search cases, statutes, regulations, court rules, and constitutions. *Fastcase* also provides access to a newspaper archive, legal forms, and a PACER search. It also offers innovative tools and platforms, such as iPhone and iPad apps.

State Courts Resources

In an ideal world state case law would be freely searchable on the Internet for everyone. There have been both commercial and non-profit efforts in recent years to make that more of a reality. Links to court related and case law information is available

in many of the legal portals covered in the previous section. The websites mentioned in this section are specifically focused on court resources and are recommended places to start your search for state case law or court information.

Google Scholar

<http://scholar.google.com/>

One of the best places to search for freely available case law is in *Google Scholar*. When you arrive at the *Google Scholar* search page there is a radio button option for ‘Legal opinions and journals’ which you need to select, since it defaults to ‘Articles.’ If you select the “Advanced Scholar Search” link next to the “Search” button, it will take you to an easy to use search form, which allows you to limit your search to one or more specific state courts. After you pull up a case, there is a tab at the top of the document, called ‘How Cited,’ which acts like a citator and includes journal articles as well as other cases. The coverage of state case law generally only goes back to the 1950’s in *Google Scholar* at this time, but this is much more than found in other free case law sources on the Internet.

LexisOne – Free Case Law

<http://law.lexisnexis.com/webcenters/lexisone/>

LexisOne has a special tab section called ‘Free Case Law’ which offers access to Federal and State Court cases for the past ten years. To determine the specific coverage for an individual state, Lexis offers an easy to use chart under the “View Limited Coverage” link. In addition to full text searching, the case law search options allow you to search

by citation, specific parties, judges, and counsel, as well as using date limitations. There is also a link in the search box which lets you browse case law for each state by year.

National Center for State Courts – State Court Web Sites

<http://www.ncsc.org/Information-and-Resources/Browse-by-State/StateCourtWebsites.aspx>

National Center for State Courts – State Court Web Sites provides judicial branch links for each of the 50 states, focusing on the administrative office of the courts, the court of last resort, any intermediate appellate courts, and each trial court level. Under each state there is a link to a “Court Structure Chart” which goes to a printable chart outlining that state’s judicial structure. These helpful charts are created and maintained by the *National Center for State Courts*.

LLRX Court Rules, Forms and Dockets

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

Recently updated in January 2011, *LLRX Court Rules, Forms and Dockets* includes links to over 1,400 sources for state and federal court rules, forms, and dockets. You can search by all fields or just the court name by keyword. There is also a browse feature which allows you through dropdown menus to browse more than one field, so you can limit your results by jurisdiction and type of materials at the same time. You can also just select a specific state in order to view all materials that are available for it.

State Statutes and Legislative Resources

There is much more breadth and depth of state statute and legislative information available on the Internet than there is for case law. You can readily find unannotated state codes, bills, hearings, and legislative calendars. State legislative links also can be found in the legal portals already covered, but these websites are excellent places to begin your search when you are looking for specific state legislative information.

Full-text State Statutes and Legislation on the Internet

<http://www.whpgs.org/f.htm>

The purpose of this website *Full-text State Statutes and Legislation on the Internet* is to link directly to websites containing full-text state constitutions, statutes, legislation (including bills, amendments, etc.), session laws, and administrative rules for each of the states. This is a very basic website maintained by an individual. The date it was last updated is clearly marked and the links are up-to-date and accurate. The website is also careful to remind you to double-check to make certain the information you locate on the Internet is current before relying on it.

LLSDC's Legislative Source Book - State Legislatures, State Laws, and State Regulations: Website Links and Telephone Numbers

<http://www.llsdc.org/state-leg>

State Laws, and State Regulations: Website Links and Telephone Numbers is part of

the Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C.'s *Legislative Source Book*. This website provides a list by state with links to those state codes and also telephone contact information for legislatures. There are also links to state law libraries when available. At the bottom of the page are additional links to helpful state government information resources.

National Conference of State Legislatures – State Legislative Websites Directory

<http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17173>

The *State Legislative Websites Directory* on the National Conference of State Legislatures website, is difficult to locate, but freely available to the public. This database contains information gleaned from the home pages and websites 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. The most distinct feature is that ability to bring up information on multiple states of your choosing at a time.

MultiState.com – The Resource for State and Local Government Relations

<http://www.multistate.com/resources.html>

MultiState.com – The Resource for State and Local Government Relations website is maintained by a lobbying firm specializing in state and local government lobbying. The link provided takes you directly to a list of resources concerning state legislatures, which may be of interest, especially if you are interested in a legislative session in another

state. One of the most interesting resources is the “2011 State Session Dates” which has a table arranged by state with current information concerning legislative sessions, including start dates, deadlines, crossover dates, and notes about special sessions. You can also get to this information by selecting the ‘Resources’ dropdown menu on the *MultiState.com* homepage. There is further description of the *MultiState.com* website in the State Legal News section later in this paper.

State Legislative History Research Guides on the Web

<http://www.law.indiana.edu/lawlibrary/research/guides/statelegislative/index.shtml>

Everyone needs assistance sometimes when trying to conduct a legislative history. The *State Legislative History Research Guides on the Web* is compiled by the Indiana University Maurer School of Law Library. It provides links to legislative history research guides gathered from reliable sources for each of the 50 states.

State Administrative Materials Resources

These are two websites that specialize in linking you directly to administrative code information for the states. Administrative materials can also be found listed in legal portals and state government portals as well.

Administrative Codes and Registers Section of the National Association of Secretaries of State

<http://www.administrativerules.org/>

The Administrative Codes and Registers Section of the National Association of Secretaries of State maintain this website and its links. The access to the administrative rules can be found under the 'Codes & Registers' link in the box on the left side of the page. When you select "Administrative Rules Online by State" you then see a list of states, each with links to its "Home Page," "Register," "Code," and "Manual" if available.

All Things Political – State Administrative Codes

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

All Things Political is a very basic government information portal. It does, however, have an easy to use list of links to all of the state administrative codes. Not everything useful has to look professional, as long as the links remain accurate.

Comparative Resources for State Legal Information

Sometimes you know you need a specific administrative provision or want to read a code section from a specific state and in those situations, finding that information is fairly straightforward. However, other times you may be dealing with an unsettled issue of Georgia law and you may want to see if you can find out what other states have done on the same issue. This section highlights a few websites that might make those

comparisons easier.

LII – Wex – Topical Index: State Statutes

http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/state_statutes

Wex is a legal encyclopedia and dictionary produced by LII at Cornell. If you select ‘all pages’ you can see the full alphabetical list of legal topics and terms. Using the link provided above takes you directly to the *Topical Index: State Statutes* section that is arranged along the lines similar to many state statutes. If you select a topic, such as “Adoption,” it takes you to a page with links to related LII materials, but also a list of the states and their relevant section of state code on that topic.

NCSL – Bill or Statute Summaries & Databases

<http://www.ncsl.org/Default.aspx?TabID=788&tabs=856,34,736#736>

The National Conference for State Legislatures limits a lot of its resources to its members. However, the *Bill or Statute Summaries & Databases* under the ‘Bill Information Services’ contains reports that are freely available. These reports cover a wide variety of specific legal issues organized under broad topical areas. The reports themselves give state by state overviews and often provide links to NCSL specialized databases. This resource is tricky to uncover and difficult to navigate, but certainly could be useful if a topic of the law you were investigating was covered.

Uniform Law Commission

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

The *Uniform Law Commission* website is maintained by the *National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws*. On their homepage you can search for uniform laws or under the dropdown menu ‘Acts’ you can browse alphabetical lists of completed uniform laws. When viewing a specific act, in addition to being able to see its text, you can follow its adoption on the Enactment Status Map, track current legislative action, read the history of the act, and access information to help assist in getting the act adopted by other state legislatures. These uniform laws are also archived and made available to the public by the Biddle Law Library at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law in corporation with the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. Their index to drafts and final acts is easy to browse, especially when you may not know exactly what you are looking for. That archive can be accessed at the following URL: < <http://www.law.upenn.edu/bll/archives/ulc/ulc.htm> >.

Findlaw – State Criminal Statute of Limitations Laws

<http://law.findlaw.com/state-laws/criminal-statute-of-limitations/>

Findlaw on their consumer platform features a section called ‘Learn About the Law’ where they have a listing by state of criminal statute of limitation laws, including time limits for prosecuting felonies and misdemeanors. Each summary also gives the citation to the relevant code section to make verify this information easier.

Nolo – Chart: Statutes of Limitations in All 50 States

<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/statute-of-limitations-state-laws-chart-29941.html>

Nolo offers free consumer legal information on their website. Under their section on when to file a lawsuit, they have put together a handy chart listing each state and the length of the statute of limitations for oral contracts, written contracts, injury, and property damage. They also supply a citation to the relevant section of the state code being referenced and caution that you should check the actual statute since statute of limitations vary in these broad categories depending on the issue at hand.

Legal Contact Information Resources by State

Occasionally, what you need is not necessarily legal resources from a state, but rather to locate a colleague or track down bar membership information. The following websites are all reliable directories to help you seek out contacts and assistance.

ABA - State & Local Bar Associations

http://www.americanbar.org/groups/bar_services/resources/state_local_bar_associations.html

The American Bar Association under its Division for Bar Services has a map and listing of each state divided between unified state bars and voluntary state bars. These links take you to contact information for the state and local bar associations for each state, including the link to the association's website if available. Often state bar websites will provide you with links to freely available state legal information that they think their membership will find useful that you can make use of as well.

State Blue Books

http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/State_Blue_Books

This listing of *State Blue Books* available on the Internet is maintained by the Government Documents Roundtable of the American Library Association. Some links, like the one for Georgia, only take you to the official government website, but links for other states that do still publish separate state directory resources, such as Tennessee, will take you to those specific directories.

Martindale.com

<http://www.martindale.com/>

Martindale.com offers directory information for lawyers, firms, and other organizations in the long tradition of the *Martindale-Hubbell Directory*. You can browse and search by geographic location and area of practice.

State Legal News Resources

It is difficult to find legal news sources that only focus on state law. There are a few resources that do focus on substantive state and Federal legal issues, which are listed below. Another approach, if you are looking for legal news in a specific state, is to identify the major newspaper for the state or metro area of interest and to search that newspaper for news on your topic.

Stateline

<http://stateline.org/>

An excellent source for state government and politics news, *Stateline* has an easy to navigate, feature-rich website. You can view recent news stories gathered from newspapers, wire services, and from *Stateline* staff writers by selecting a specific state, browsing all states, or in one of 15 issue areas. RSS feeds are available for individual states and issue areas as well. *Stateline* is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news service of the Pew Center on the States. *Stateline* content is published daily at *Stateline.org* and can be found on *LexisNexis*, *Factiva*, and news outlets served by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Jurist – U.S. Legal News

<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/uslatest/>

JURIST- U.S. Legal News provides coverage of legal news at the state level as well as federal level, however, there is no way to limit the feed to just state legal news. *JURIST* is hosted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and staffed by law professors and students reporting and researching law in real time, as a public service. The mission of its reporters and editors is to focus on the legal importance of news stories rather than on their mass-market appeal. In practice, this means that *JURIST* tends to have less sensational news about crimes, trials and celebrities, and instead concentrates on substantive legal and political issues with significant social and jurisprudential implications.

ABA Journal

<http://www.abajournal.com/>

ABA Journal is an excellent source for free legal news on the Internet. The homepage contains the its top stories, the latest stories arranged by topic, links to the most read stories, and links to its most popular legal blogs tracked in their “Blawg Directory.”

Under the ‘Subscribe’ tab there are directions on subscribing to one of their three RSS feeds, their email newsletters, and even, for a fee, the monthly paper magazine version.

MultiState.com – State Newspapers

[http:// www.multistate.com/statenewspapers.html](http://www.multistate.com/statenewspapers.html)

MultiState.com – State Newspapers provides a simple list of the fifty states and the District of Columbia, each of which link to what *MultiState.com* has determined to be the primary newspaper in that state for legislative news coverage. These are not necessarily the largest newspapers in a state (although they may be), but instead are often the state capital’s city newspaper or a newspaper that is distributed state-wide. If the newspaper maintains a separate section for legislative or political news, it will link directly to that section. There is more discussion of *MultiState.com* in the ‘State Statutes and Legislative Resources’ section previously.

NewsLink

<http://www.newslink.org/>

There are probably more attractive websites with newspaper information on the Internet, but the real strength still of *NewsLink.org* is that it organizes newspapers by

type within a state, so you can more readily identify a major daily metro newspaper from a weekly entertainment alternative or a campus newspaper for a major university. This feature is especially helpful for states and localities that you may not be familiar with and need assistance identifying the most authoritative source.

Local Government Information Resources

The smaller the jurisdiction, the more challenging it is to find legal information on the Internet. Some of the state government and legal portals mentioned earlier in this paper will also link you to government information at the county and city levels. Most notably, *GovEngine.com* < <http://www.govengine.com/> > and *State and Local Government on the Net* < <http://www.statelocalgov.net/> > provide a large number of links to the governmental websites for localities. Most often you will be linked to official government websites for these local jurisdictions which can vary greatly in their quality and content. There is a notable lack of current primary law from localities on the Internet. A few commercial producers of local codes have made these local codes freely available on their websites, but searching these local codes is limited to one code at a time and very few geographic locations are covered.

National Association of Counties

[http:// www.naco.org/](http://www.naco.org/)

A lobbying group for county governments at the Federal level, the *National Association*

of Counties website features “Find a County” search options under its ‘About Counties’ dropdown menu, making it easy to locate basic county information and links. They also have city and county searches and lists of county seats. The section called “Find Solutions” under the ‘Research & Publications’ dropdown menu features sample codes and ordinances arranged by issue area.

Municode.com

<http://municode.com/>

Municode.com makes available a large number of local ordinances from all around the country. You can browse and search one code at a time for free under their ‘Municode Library’ linked in several spots on their homepage. The codes are not always current, but when they were last updated is clearly marked in the banner information for each code. Under the ‘Products’ tab, *Municode.com* also makes available free “State Law Pamphlets” for 15 states, including Georgia and Florida, to help you know what important changes have occurred to the state code.

eCode360 – Municipal Codes on the Internet

<http://www.generalcode.com/Webcode2.html>

Similar to *Municode*, *General Code* is a commercial codification service, which also makes individual codes freely available for browsing and searching. Their coverage is for only 24 states, with the most codes available for some of the Mid-Atlantic and Upper Midwest regions.

Conclusion

Much state legal information is freely available on the Internet, but, like with all Internet resources, you need to carefully review resources for currency, completeness, and accuracy. While this guide to state legal resources is not comprehensive, it does highlight some of the most effective websites to use when searching for primary law or other legal information at the state or local level.