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# Researching Georgia Legislative History

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# RESEARCHING *Georgia Legislative History*

By CAROL A. WATSON (J.D.'87), ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

*Attorneys often seek Georgia legislative history when trying to clarify a vague statute, determine the intent of the legislature or trace a law's amendments over time. Although sometimes difficult to compile, Georgia legislative history tidbits can be gathered by consulting a variety of resources.*

## Steps for Locating Georgia Legislative History

### 1. Before You Begin

You should become familiar with how legislation is passed in Georgia. Understanding the legislative process in Georgia will help you to evaluate the usefulness of the materials you locate.

### 2. Decide How Much Time You Want to Spend

The Georgia General Assembly does not publish official transcripts of its floor debate or committee reports. As a result, the hunt for legislative intent can be time-consuming and may not always produce results.

To avoid frustration, decide up front how much time you are willing to devote to this research task.

Also, keep in mind, the Georgia courts primarily look at the plain meaning of the statute when determining legislative intent. You may do a great deal of research into the legislative intent of a statute only to have your argument rejected by the court.

### 3. Identify Session Laws

Consult the history notes of an annotated code such as the O.C.G.A. to locate references to session laws.

Make a list of the session laws that you identify.

The first reference will be to the original statute. The remaining references are to amendments of the statute.

### 4. Review Session Law Text

A session law's preamble will often include a statement of purpose, which can provide valuable insight into legislative intent.

It is also useful to compare versions of the session laws each time the statute has been amended in order to identify text changes that have occurred over time.

### 5. Consult the Peach Sheets

The *Georgia State University Law Review* annually analyzes selected Georgia legislation in its fall issue, often referred to as the Peach Sheets.

You can easily spot the fall issue because the color of the law review's pages is peach.

The Peach Sheets include analysis of the bills, relevant floor debate, personal interviews and newspaper articles.

## 6. Skim House and Senate Journals

The Georgia House and Senate journals do not contain transcripts of legislative proceedings. Also, the bill text is not in the journals.

However, the text of amendments is included as well as votes, committee actions and sponsors.

## 7. Compare Versions of Bills

Compare different versions of a bill to identify which text has been added or deleted. Sometimes, these additions or deletions can help clarify the legislative intent of the bill.

## 8. Locate Audio or Video Files

In recent years, the Georgia Public Broadcasting and the General Assembly Web sites have included audio and video files of committee hearings, floor debates and press conferences.

## 9. Search Media Coverage

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and other local media outlets extensively cover the legislature while in session. Quotes from legislators can indicate legislative intent.

Additionally, many political commentators and special interest groups provide online analysis of legislative proposals.

## 10. Contact the Georgia General Assembly

If all else fails, contact the offices of the Clerk of the House or Secretary of the Senate. These offices provide information on official documents to the general public.

## Quick Guide

### The Georgia Legislative Process

*Passing a Law in the Georgia General Assembly* – [georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/legchart/legchart.htm](http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/legchart/legchart.htm)

Georgia General Assembly, *New Georgia Encyclopedia* – [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-3164](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-3164)

### Georgia Code

*Official Code of Georgia Annotated* – [www.lexis-nexis.com/hottopics/gacode/Default.asp](http://www.lexis-nexis.com/hottopics/gacode/Default.asp)

### Session Laws

The print version of the *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia* is available at all five of Georgia's academic law libraries as well as at many local public and college libraries.

Georgia Legislative Documents from 1799 to 1999 – [www.galileo.usg.edu/express?link=zlgl](http://www.galileo.usg.edu/express?link=zlgl)

### Georgia State University Law Review's Peach Sheets

*Georgia State University Law Review* from 1984 to 2007 – [digitalarchive.gsu.edu/colpub\\_peachsheets](http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/colpub_peachsheets)

### House and Senate Journals

*House Journals* from 1781 to 1995 and *Senate Journals* from 1789 to 1995 will soon be included in Galileo's Georgia Legislative Documents – [www.galileo.usg.edu/express?link=zlgl](http://www.galileo.usg.edu/express?link=zlgl)

### Georgia House and Senate Bills

Bills from the current session of the legislature – [www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10)

Bills from 1995 to 2008 – [www.legis.state.ga.us/links/Prev.htm](http://www.legis.state.ga.us/links/Prev.htm)

House bills from 1979 to 1995 – contact the Clerk of the House  
Senate bills from 1969 to 1995 – contact the Secretary of the Senate

House and Senate bills from 1838 to present – contact the Georgia State Archives: (678) 364-3700

### Audio and Video Coverage

Georgia Public Television's live stream – [www.gpb.org/general-assembly](http://www.gpb.org/general-assembly)

Georgia House of Representatives' Georgia Legislative Network – [www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/house/Committees/GLNI/boardcastIndex.htm](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/house/Committees/GLNI/boardcastIndex.htm)

Georgia Senate Press Office – [www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/senate/pressreleases.htm](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/senate/pressreleases.htm)

### Media Coverage

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* – [www.ajc.com](http://www.ajc.com)

*AJC's Political Insider* with Jim Galloway – [blogs.ajc.com/political-insider-jim-galloway](http://blogs.ajc.com/political-insider-jim-galloway)

*AJC's Gold Dome Live* – [blogs.ajc.com/gold-dome-live](http://blogs.ajc.com/gold-dome-live)

GPTV's Lawmakers blog – [georgialawmakers.blogspot.com](http://georgialawmakers.blogspot.com)

### Contact the Georgia General Assembly

Clerk of the House – (404) 656-5015

Secretary of the Senate – (404) 656-5040

Georgia General Assembly – [www.legis.state.ga.us](http://www.legis.state.ga.us)