

Compiling a New Hampshire Legislative History

Adapted from the *New Hampshire Legislative History Pathfinder* by Christine Swan.
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New Hampshire Law Library

- Using the *New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated*¹ (NH RSA), locate the relevant section of the statute.
- Find the History section of the statute. Read the historical notes² to determine which year of the law and/or which amendment is relevant to your research.
- Once you've narrowed down the year, look at the Source note to find the session law³ or statutory compilation⁴ number.
- Using the number, look up the session law in the *Laws of the State of New Hampshire* (NH Laws).⁵ or the statutory compilation⁶ for the appropriate year.
- Identify the House or Senate bill number.⁷
- Compare the "as introduced version"⁸ of bill to the session law.
- Locate the New Hampshire House and Senate Journals for the appropriate year. Check the indexes at the back of the House and Senate Journals for pages citing your bill.⁹ Read and follow the path of the legislation through the House and Senate. Note the name of the Committee¹⁰ to which the bill was referred.
- With the name of the Committee, the year and the bill number in hand, check the records of Committee hearings.¹¹
- You may also want to review actions in earlier sessions of the General Court. Often, it takes several tries for a bill to be enacted and much of the relevant discussion may have taken place in earlier sessions. Also, check the subject index in the Journals for the year of your bill, to see if any other bills were introduced on your topic.

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Notes

¹ Find the NH RSAs in print at the Law Library, the State Library and some local public libraries. Also see Revised Statutes Online at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/indexes/default.html>.

² Statutes can be amended many, many times and the historical notes may help you narrow down the year or years you really need. Historical notes are not available in the online version of the statutes at [www.NH.gov](http://www.nh.gov), they are found only in annotated codes. The Source Note is in any version.

³ An example of a session law reference is: 1973, 145:13 which translates to, *Laws of the State of New Hampshire*, 1973 session, chapter 145, section 13.

⁴ NH RSA Source note may refer to older (before 1955) compilations of New Hampshire statutes. These compilations are cited as follows:

RS - <i>Revised Statutes</i>	1842	PS - <i>Public Statutes</i>	1891
CS - <i>Compiled Statutes</i>	1853	GL - <i>General Laws</i>	1878
GS - <i>General Statutes</i>	1867	PL - <i>Public Laws</i>	1926
		RL - <i>Revised Laws</i>	1942

⁵The *Laws of the State of New Hampshire* is the chronological compilation of session laws. In 1984, the legislature switched from biennial to annual sessions and the NH Laws are now issued annually. A session law may contain a preamble, a statement of purpose, or a “findings and declaration” section that is not included in the NH RSAs but which may clarify legislative intent. NH Laws may be found at the Law Library, the State Library and many public libraries. The Chaptered Final Version of a session law, may be found online at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/>.

⁶ Early statutory compilations are found at the Law Library. They are not available online at www.nh.gov.

⁷ The easiest way to track the progress of the bill through the legislature is to use the bill number. Depending upon the year of the bill, there are a variety of ways to find the bill number.

- For laws after 1979, the bill number appears next to the chapter number in the print session laws.
- For laws 1989 to present, go online to Advanced Bill Status Search (http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/). Enter the relevant year and chapter number and click “Search.”
- For laws 1965 to present, use the *Final Disposition of Bills and Resolutions* table, which was published 1965 to 1974 by the State Library, and from 1975 to the present by the Office of the House Clerk. A *Final Status/Disposition of Bills* also appears in the last volume for each Senate and House Journal between 1955 and 1967.
- Prior to 1955, no numerical indexes are available to identify bill numbers.

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- For laws 1977 to present, the New Hampshire House and Senate Journals have chapter to bill tables.

⁸ 1970 to present, the “as introduced” House and Senate bills are available in the Law Library. 1878 to present “as introduced” House bills are available at the State Library. 1891 to present “as introduced” Senate bills are available at the State Library. Be careful using the online bills at www.nh.gov. Once a bill is enacted, only the FINAL version is available online, not the “as introduced” version. Why look at the “as introduced” version? Changes in the language of the bill may alert you to other areas to research or give insight into the General Court’s intent.

⁹ From 1969 to present, look up the bill number in the Numerical indexes. Prior to 1969, check the Subject indexes using words from the title of the session law as search terms. The House Journal does not include most debate from the floor of the House, but since 1973, all Senate floor debate is recorded in the Senate Journal. To listen to floor debates online, go to <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/> for streaming audio. Some committee hearings are also online. Roll call votes may be recorded separately at the back of the last volume for each year for each House and Senate Journal.

¹⁰ In the later Journals, the name of the Committee is included in the index. In the earlier versions, you’ll have to read the text of the entry to find the name.

¹¹ If a Study Committee was established, there will generally be a Report. Copies of Reports from 1995 to present are kept at the State Library (271-2144). Committee files may contain transcripts of oral testimony and written submissions, the bill as introduced, voting records and other information. Committee files and minutes are available as follows:

- Microfiche of the following committee hearings are available at both the State Library and the Law Library:
 - House Judiciary, 1935 - 1979
 - Senate Judiciary, 1951 - 1979
 - House (all committees) 1981
- Minutes for all other Committee hearings are available at Records Management and Archives: 71 South Fruit Street, Concord, N.H. (271-2236.) You will need the bill number, year, and committee.
- The current year or so of hearings is retained in the State House with the House and Senate Clerks offices, (271-2548 and 271-3420 respectively).
- A very limited span of committee files have been scanned and are available online at www.nh.gov. The earliest appears to be from 1999, the latest from 2002 but more are being added. If the files are available, a link to Bill History will appear in the Search Results of the Bill Status System.