Researching Federal Legislative History

Always Start with the Text of the Law…

**United States Code:**

- Contains all public and permanent federal laws currently in force and is arranged by subject matter.
- **Where to find:**
  - In print (USC, USCA, USCS) or online via FDsys, ProQuest Congressional, Westlaw, Lexis
  - If only have name, use a popular name table

**Session Laws (United States Statutes at Large):**

- After enactment, a law is assigned a public law number – ex) PL 113-74. 1st number is Congress; 2nd is sequential.
- After legislative session ends, public laws are printed sequentially in the Statutes at Large.
- **Where to find:**
  - In print (Statutes at Large) or online via FDsys, Thomas, Hein Online*, ProQuest Congressional, ProQuest Legislative Insight, Westlaw, Lexis

...then, Read the Legislative History in Reverse

**Bills:**

- Assigned sequential numbers within each house. Bill may be amended many times throughout legislative process.
- **Where to find:**
  - Online via Thomas, FDsys, ProQuest Legislative Insight, ProQuest Congressional*, Westlaw, Lexis

**Conference Committee Reports:**

- After passage in both houses, members from each may meet to resolve differences but can’t change language previously agreed upon. If available, report contains new bill language and a joint explanation of the compromise.
- **Where to find:**
  - In print (USCCAN) or online via Thomas, FDsys, ProQuest Legislative Insight, ProQuest Congressional*, Westlaw, Lexis

**Floor Debate (Congressional Record):**

- Contains verbatim account of the proceedings and debate of Congress, as well as inserted materials and communications from the President and exec agencies.
- **Where to find:**
  - In print (Congressional Record) or online via FDsys, Thomas, ProQuest Congressional*, ProQuest Legislative Insight, Westlaw, Lexis

**Committee Reports:**

- Committee members report and make recommendations to the House or Senate as a whole. If legislation was considered in prior session(s), report may contain history.
- **Where to find:**
  - In print (USCCAN) or online via Thomas, FDsys, ProQuest Legislative Insight, ProQuest Congressional*, Westlaw, Lexis

**Hearings:**

- Hearings are held to enable committees to gather opinions and information on proposed legislation.
- **Where to find:**
  - Online via FDsys, ProQuest Congressional*, ProQuest Legislative Insight, Westlaw, Lexis

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* This source contains the most complete holdings

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