

# Research Wisconsin Legislative History

Wisconsin State Law Library  
wilawlibrary.gov

1

Identify statutory language

Find originating act

Look at history notes to browse the list of acts or rules

Compare older statutes to find the session when the language changed

2

**Check back of this sheet for a list of online, print, and microfiche sources**

If it's a budget act, get help from the Legislative Reference Bureau

Get bill number and section number to help with browsing through the drafting file

Read originating act

Skip to step 7 for court rules

3

Check list of renumbered or repealed statutes and statute indexes

**Ask a librarian if you need help finding the originating act**

Look for secondary materials

4

Check history notes for resources that may discuss legislative history or intent

Use act and bill numbers, statute sections as search terms in databases

Check legislative agency reports

**Someone may have already compiled and published a legislative history**

Print or save procedural history at start of drafting record to help you browse through drafting record

Failed bills are arranged by bill number in the drafting records

Drafting files for passed bills are arranged by act number

Check bill and act drafting records

5

7

**A librarian can help you use the Judicial Council archives**

As necessary, check Governor's veto message and journals

6

Read Supreme Court rule order, search Judicial Council files

Judicial Council notes in the history note can refer to Judicial Council committee work

Check more sources as relevant

8

## Sources: Research Wisconsin Legislative History

### 1. Identify statutory language

West's *Wisconsin Statutes Annotated*

*Wisconsin Statutes and Annotations* (print)

Wisconsin Statutes

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/prefaces/toc>

### 2. Find originating act

History notes available in:

West's *Wisconsin Statutes Annotated* 1849 to present

*Wisconsin Statutes and Annotations* (print) 1971 to present

For history from 1849-1970, check *1970 Wisconsin Annotations*

<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/1971/statutes/annotations>

Wisconsin Statutes 1971 to present

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/prefaces/toc>

Compare statutes to narrow down year range

*Wisconsin Statutes and Annotations* (print)

1849, 1858, 1878, 1898 and every biennium from 1911 to present

Wisconsin Statutes archive 1941 to present

<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/archive>

Reach a dead end? Check finding aids for older references

List covering 1913-1969 in *1970 Wisconsin Annotations*

<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/1971/statutes/annotations>

Repealed and renumbered statutes, sections affected by Wisconsin Acts, and more 1970 to present

[http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/help/statutes/\\_15](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/help/statutes/_15)

### 3. Read originating act

*Laws of Wisconsin* (print) 1848 to present

Acts archive, with gaps 1849 to present

<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/archive>

### 4. Look for secondary materials

Annotations in history notes

Search our catalog for Legislative agency reports – often reference act or bill number or subject in title.

Joint Legislative Council committee records – search our catalog, check online or at LRB

Case law databases (Fastcase, Westlaw, Lexis); Westlaw on library computers

Treatises; Books Unbound database on library computers

## Wisconsin State Law Library

[wilawlibrary.gov](http://wilawlibrary.gov)

### 5. Examine bill and drafting record

Drafting files online 1999 to present

[http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/drafting\\_files](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/drafting_files)

Drafting files on microfiche 1927 to present

Passed laws are found under the act or chapter number

Failed bills are found under the bill number

### 6. Procedural history & governor's veto message

Procedural history is often included in the first few pages of a drafting record.

Print this off to use as a reference while reading through the drafting file.

Procedural history, including summary voting record is also found:

Appendix to each house journal 1907-1911

Index to journals 1913-1965

Bulletins of proceedings for Senate or Assembly 1967 to present

Online in session archives 1995 to present

<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/archive>

Governor's veto message

WI Legislature website by session under "other" category 1995 to present

[http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/session\\_archive](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/session_archive)

### 7. Supreme Court rules orders & Judicial Council files

Rule orders and petitions 1995 to present

<http://www.wicourts.gov/scrules/supreme.htm>

Rule orders also printed in *Wisconsin Reports* volumes 1850 to present

Background materials online or at Clerk's office

In our library: Judicial Council committee proceedings from 1960's to 1995

Minutes from 1951 to 2007

Judicial Council minutes 2007 to present

<http://www.wicourts.gov/courts/committees/judicialcouncil/minutes.htm>

### 8. Check more sources as relevant

News and other articles

<http://wilawlibrary.gov/search/articles.html>

WisconsinEye hearings

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

Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) clippings file in LRB library 1905 to present

Legislative committee records: contact LRB. Very brief reports can be found in legislative journals

Contact key individuals

Uniform laws: *Uniform Laws Annotated*

Historical case law (English and Early American Reports)