

About Topical Legislative Histories

- 1) **What is a topical legislative history?** The Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library has created legislative histories on major or recurring topics (e.g. capital punishment). Each topical legislative history is comprised of numerous individual legislative histories of laws that enacted or amended the law on a specific topic.
- 2) **What materials are included in a topical legislative history?**
 - a) *Chapter law*
 - b) *Legislative document, new draft, and selected amendments* – An act might address several areas of law. The topical legislative histories provide links only to those amendments related to provisions that are relevant to the topic at hand. Amendments marked with an asterisk (*) did *not* affect sections of the bill related to the topic at hand and are not included. Some legislative histories include only amendments that passed. Some include passed and proposed amendments.
 - c) *Debate* –The topical legislative histories include excerpts from the *Legislative Record* which document debate or remarks only. They do not include excerpts from the *Record* which document procedural actions. Furthermore, they contain debate related only to provisions that are relevant to the topic at hand.
 - d) *Committee files* – Committee files are not available for all legislative documents. Sometimes, changes to certain statutes are made by a broad piece of legislation and the bill’s committee file might include materials that are not related to the topic at hand. In these situations, if the researcher did not find committee materials relevant to the bill, it will be noted, “Yes, but nothing relevant to...”
 - e) *Legislative reports* – Reports are not available for all legislative documents.
 - f) *News clips* – News clips are not available for all legislative documents.
- 3) **How are topical legislative histories different from the Law Library’s other compiled legislative histories?** Topical legislative histories allow researchers to see how an area of law has changed over time, often going back decades or centuries to the origin of particular statutory language. They contain *selected* material for each legislative document listed (see above). The Law Library’s individual legislative histories are currently available only for bills going back to 1993 (116th Legislature). They include *complete* legislative history information for each bill. For example, an individual legislative history lists all proposed and passed amendments, all debate, and all actions in the *Legislative Record* related to a particular bill.
- 4) **Why can’t I access committee files online?** Topical legislative histories indicate whether a committee file is available for a particular bill. If you would like to view the committee file, please contact the Law Library. Committee files often contain copyrighted materials, and the Law Library may not republish them online. Furthermore, committee files are not available for all legislative documents. They are available for most bills from 1983 (111th Legislature) forward although early years have less material.
- 5) **Why can’t I access news clips online?** News articles are protected by copyright and the Law Library may not republish them online.
- 6) **How do I get copies of news clips cited in a topical legislative history?** Please contact the Law Library.
- 7) **How do I get copies of committee files cited in a topical legislative history?** Please contact the Law Library.
- 8) **How do I contact the Law Library?** If you have any questions while conducting legislative history research, please contact us at <http://www.maine.gov/legis/lawlib/refemail.htm> or (207) 287-1600.