

University of Oregon
JOHN E. JAQUA LAW LIBRARY

ABOUT OREGON LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

[Already familiar with the Oregon legislative process? You may wish to go directly to the Law Library handout “Steps for Researching Oregon Legislative History.”]

Oregon has increasingly documented the legislative process, and the year a bill was introduced determines how much legislative history material is available. Pivotal to researching legislative intent are the minutes created by the House and Senate committees in their deliberations on the measures that come before the chambers. The minutes summarize the hearings and highlight major points of discussion, and include date and time of hearing, individuals present, and measures heard, and are kept for House, Senate, Joint, and Interim committees. The minutes vary in detail as to the actions and discussion that took place in the committee meetings and are not a verbatim account of the meetings. Prior to audiotaping, which began selectively in 1957, there is no verbatim account of the committee meetings. Exhibits are submitted by legislators, committee staff, and witnesses, and include proposed amendments, written testimony, reports, and letters regarding bills. Since 1987 some exhibits have been submitted on videotape.

The legislature did not begin keeping committee minutes and exhibits until the late 1920s when the Interim Workmen's Compensation Committee materials for 1926-27 were placed with the Oregon State Archives, which is the official repository of Oregon Legislative History. Much of the earlier materials in the form of the 1843 Organic Laws creating Oregon's Provisional Government, some original bill files dating from 1876 to 1931, and manuscript copies of Senate and House Journals dating from 1865 to 1923, were destroyed in a fire in the state capitol in 1935. Thus there are few legislative history materials predating 1926. Continuous recordkeeping began in 1961 when ORS 171.420 was passed directing the deposit of legislative records with the Archives. Committee minutes from 1991 to the present are searchable on the Internet at <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/banners/legis.htm>. Exhibits are not included on the Internet.

The reference staff at State Archives compiles “legislative tracings” on bills for which someone has requested the legislative materials. The tracings show the committees through which the bill has passed, the dates and pages in the minutes where discussion can be found, a listing of exhibits, and a listing of the corresponding audiotape, if one exists. See <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/banners/legis.htm> for an explanation and list of tracings compiled since 1989. Legislative history before 1961 is sketchy and the researcher should check with Archives for full availability. The telephone number is (503) 373-0701, x1.

The legislative history materials at the University of Oregon Law Library consist of microfilm containing the committee minutes and exhibits from 1947 through 1995. These are located in the microfilm area on the north end of the main floor of the Law Library [Reading Room], (KFO 2410 .O74 L44, cabinets 22–23). Interim committee reports are not included on the microfilm and the researcher should check with a librarian for availability. For each legislative session, the minutes from each house are arranged alphabetically by committee name,

and thereunder chronologically by hearing date. The exhibits are arranged alphabetically by committee name, and thereunder by bill number, date, letter, or subject; exhibits may be contained on separate reels from the minutes. The Law Library does not have the audiotapes themselves. The researcher must either go to Salem to review the audiotape, or request a copy for a small fee.

The *Guide to Legislative Records in the Oregon State Archives* (KFO 2821.5 .C6 A126, in the Reference Area), published by Archives, contains a records inventory of the minutes, exhibits and audiotapes available from Archives; these are organized by legislative session and committee. This inventory does not give a detailed list of contents of the microfilms for particular bills, but it can alert the researcher to whether there are exhibits for the session and committee being researched. An online version of the Guide is available http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/legislative/legislative_guide/legislative_guide/contents.html.