

# SOURCES OF MICHIGAN LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

## ***Introduction***

For various reasons, a person may wish to review the pre-enactment history of a section of Michigan law. This pre-enactment history of legislation is often referred to as legislative history. Such information can be of value for general historical research and, in some instances, is used for more specific legal research as a way of attempting to ascertain the intent of the legislature in enacting a statute. It is well established in Michigan case law that where statutory language is plain and unambiguous, the courts are to avoid examination of legislative history. Where ambiguity exists in a statute, however, the courts may construe these statutes in accordance with their intent. Reviewing the legislative history of a Michigan statute is part of the process of determining legislative intent.

At the federal level, there are a number of popular sources for locating legislative history, including the ***United States Code Congressional and Administrative News***, ***Congressional Digest***, ***Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report***, ***Congressional Index***, and ***Congressional Record***. In Michigan, as in most states, background materials on legislation are rarely compiled in a central repository. This is due to a number of factors, including the expense involved and the relatively small number of users of such information.

By looking at a number of diverse sources, however, one may obtain some very useful background information on a law. A review of proposed and adopted amendments, arguments for and against, and individual viewpoints on a piece of legislation may lend some insight into the reasons behind the passage of a bill. By tracking the progress of a bill, especially proposed changes and the arguments for proposing or rejecting these changes, the researcher may be able to learn something about the specific purpose or purposes for which a bill was passed.

From introduction to enactment, a bill goes through the various steps of the legislative process to ensure that each bill is adequately reviewed before it becomes law. The legislative process typically consists of a number of stages allowing for the study, review, and debate of proposed legislation. This process includes input from private citizens, public agencies, and representatives of private interest groups at committee hearings, as well as from legislators during committee meetings and floor debates. This aggregate testimony and debate, both written and oral, contribute to the final form a piece of legislation takes.

## ***House and Senate Journals***

In Michigan, the House and Senate Journals are the first sources of background material that should be examined by persons seeking information on the history of legislation. These journals are the official record of action taken on legislation by the house and the senate, but are not a verbatim record of the proceedings. Nonetheless, they contain essential research information such as citations, sponsors' names, names of committees which considered the bill, dates when action was taken, and roll call votes. This information can be useful in pointing to further sources the researcher may have to consult. In addition, the journals often contain material that has a direct bearing upon legislative history, such as amendments which were offered but defeated, "no vote" explanations by members, and titles of reports filed by committees. Journals are maintained by the Library of Michigan (517/373-1300) and the State Law Library of the Library of Michigan (517/373-0630), as well as numerous local libraries, especially Michigan documents depository libraries, and county libraries throughout the state.

To locate and trace a bill through the various steps of the legislative process, the researcher can use the indices of the House and Senate Journals for the year a law was enacted. It may also be necessary to check either the preceding or subsequent year's journals, since a bill can take up to two years to progress through the biennial meetings of each legislature. Using the Bill and Joint Resolution Index and/or the General Index for each house's journals, one can find the number of the bill in question. The journals also contain a table of acts and corresponding bill numbers, allowing one to find a bill's number by checking it against the public act number. With the bill number one can use another part of the journals, the Bill Histories, to track the actions taken on bills during the enactment process. This bill history section of the index will reference the House or Senate Journal for the day on which the action took place and the number of the page of the journal on which the action is recorded.

Prior to the publication of each session's journals in bound volumes, daily journals are available on the Internet at the Michigan Legislature Website ([www.mileg.org](http://www.mileg.org)). House and Senate

Journals for the 1997 session through the present are also available on the site. After clicking on the "Journals" hyperlink, select the appropriate session by number, date, or year.

### ***Status Report, Bills***

The most frequently used source for the status report on a bill is the on-line ***Legislative Information System***, found on the Michigan Legislature website and maintained by the Michigan Legislative Council, the Michigan House of Representatives, and the Michigan Senate and administered by the Legislative Internet Technology Team. This system allows a researcher to obtain bill status reports for the current and previous legislative sessions going back to 1997. The system is searchable by bill number, sponsor, subject, or keyword. It can be accessed at numerous places including the Library of Michigan and State Law Library, as well as on the Internet. Each bill page provides the bill's status, history, some analyses, text of various versions, and links to the appropriate House and Senate Journals where actions were taken.

An individual can obtain a copy of a current session bill or joint resolution, as introduced, substituted, or enrolled, from the Legislative Document Room (517/373-0169). This office, located in the North Capitol Annex, can also provide copies of current public acts. Bills, substitute bills, and public acts from prior sessions may be obtained from the Library of Michigan or the State Law Library.

On-line versions of many of these documents are available from the Michigan Legislature's home page, for 1997 to the present, in either PDF or text format.

Other useful sources which may provide information are ***Unofficial Amended Senate Bills*** and ***Unofficial Amended House Bills***. These provide the text of all bills that were amended after introduction, with notations made concerning amendments and substitutes. The State Archives of the Michigan Historical Center has bound volumes of unofficial bills from 1947 to 1978. The Legislative Service Bureau Research and Reference Collection has access to them for 1989 to the present.

Copies of all bills that were introduced from 1853 to 2002 are available at the State Archives section of the Bureau of History, Michigan Department of State (517/373-1408). For the current session, these bills are available from the Office of the Great Seal of the Michigan Department of State (517/373-2531).

### ***Text of Laws***

To review a law or an amendment to a law made in a previous session of the legislature, one can reference a number of sources. If the act number and year are already known, the researcher may consult several sources containing the laws for each year's session. The ***Public and Local Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan***, published by the Legislative Service Bureau, is the annual compilation of each session's public acts, local acts, veto messages of the governor, executive reorganization orders, joint resolutions, constitutional amendments, initiated laws, and other information. Another source is ***Michigan Legislative Service***, a compilation published by the West Group, issued periodically during the legislative year and containing most of the same information found in the *Public and Local Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan*. Since 2000, West Group has also published ***Michigan Session Laws*** on an annual basis. These bound volumes contain all the information provided by the previous year's *Michigan Legislative Service* pamphlets, plus an alphabetical table of acts, executive orders, and executive reorganization orders for the year. A comparable service, ***Advance Legislative Service for Michigan Compiled Laws Service***, is published by LexisNexis. These sets are indexed and contain tables that indicate which public acts of that year, if any, amend any section of the ***Michigan Compiled Laws***. A major advantage of the commercial publications is that changes in the text of a law made by an amendatory act are indicated by the insertion of an underline under the new language, and deletions of existing law are noted by the insertion of deletion marks in place of the deleted language. This time-saving technique can be very useful in determining the specific changes made by an amendatory act.

The Public and Local Acts for 1999 and subsequent years are available online on the Michigan Legislature's Web site. This source does not replace the official version of the acts on file with the Michigan Secretary of State.

If it is not known specifically when a law was enacted or when a particular amendment was made to a law, one may refer to either of three compilations of Michigan law. The ***Michigan Compiled Laws (1979)*** is the official publication of Michigan statutes, although this version

reflects only the body of Michigan statutory law of a general and permanent nature through the end of 1979. It can, however, be updated by using either the *Public and Local Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan* or *Michigan Legislative Service*. **Michigan Compiled Laws Online**, also administered by the Legislative Internet Technology Team and available through the Michigan Legislature's home page, provides a fairly up-to-date version of Michigan statutory law. It can be searched quickly and in a number of different ways, including statute citation, popular name, chapter number, or by words or phrases. It can also be accessed by calling the Law Library of the Library of Michigan. Two other versions of the state's statutes, **Michigan Compiled Laws Annotated (MCLA)**, prepared by the West Group, and **Michigan Compiled Laws Service (MCLS)**, prepared by LexisNexis, contain a number of additional editorial features which can be of particular value to the researcher. Both are kept relatively current through the preceding calendar year by the use of annual pocket parts and pamphlet supplements which reflect any changes in the text of the law made during the years succeeding the printing of each volume of these sets. All three compilations contain catchlines at the beginning of each statute, so that the reader can tell at a glance the subject of a section. These publications also contain history notes following each statute, indicating the source of each statute and a list of subsequent amendatory acts. *Michigan Compiled Laws Service* and *Michigan Compiled Laws Annotated*, moreover, have an additional feature: "effect of amendment" notes. These notes indicate not only which public acts amended each particular statute, but also the substantive change made to the statute by each amendatory public act. The advantage of "effect of amendment" notes is that, by using these, the researcher is not required to read every amendment to a particular statute in order to find which act added, amended, or deleted the specific text in which he or she is interested.

### ***Committee Records***

Legislative committee records may provide another source of background material. Over the past several years, efforts on the part of the Offices of the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House to standardize committee record retention and storage schedules have facilitated the availability of these records. For the House, some materials for certain committees are available for the period 1965 to 1998 in the State Archives (517/373-1408). At the beginning of each odd-numbered year, the previous biennial session's House committee records are boxed and handed over to the office of Clerk of the House, which sends them to the State Archives after being microfilmed by the State Record Center. These microfilmed records are available to the public immediately after the microfilming process is completed. Current House committee records are available by calling the House committee rooms (517/373-0015).

In the Senate, materials for certain committees are available for the period 1965 to 1994 in the State Archives. Committee records are available for all Senate committees, upon application to the Secretary of the Senate, for the 1995-2002 sessions of the legislature. Current Senate committee records are available directly from each Senate committee clerk (517/373-2400). At the beginning of each odd-numbered year, the previous biennial session's Senate committee records are boxed and handed over to the Secretary of the Senate for storage and retrieval at the State Records Center of the Michigan Department of Management and Budget. These records are kept at the State Records Center for a period of two years, during which access is available only through the Secretary of the Senate's office, and are then transferred to and maintained, for public use, at the State Archives.

These committee records may include committee minutes (date, time, place of meeting, decisions made, and roll call votes), bill analyses, and letters and written position statements which may have been submitted to the committee by interested parties. Tape recordings of meetings and public hearings conducted by committees may also be available. Video recordings of certain House and Senate committee meetings, dating from 1997 to the present, are available for a nominal fee from Michigan Government Television, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.

### ***Session Tape Recordings***

For the period 1968 to 1998, audio tape recordings of most House sessions are available at the State Archives. Additionally, audio tape recordings of Senate sessions are available for the current session, through the office of the Secretary of the Senate. It should be noted, however, that the journals of the Senate and the House of Representatives are the only official record of each session.

Michigan Government Television, which has been in operation since July 1996, was established, in part, to provide live and/or videotaped coverage of important events in all three branches of

Michigan government. This organization has televised, live or on tape, all Senate sessions since October 14, 1997, and all House sessions since October 23, 1997. Copies are available for a nominal fee.

### ***“Boilerplate” Language in Appropriation Acts***

Depending upon the subject being studied, a researcher may also wish to examine the so-called “boilerplate” language of appropriation acts. Boilerplate is language inserted into appropriation acts which attaches certain conditions to appropriations or which may require a recipient agency to make reports to the legislature either before or after the expenditure of such appropriations. Thus, boilerplate language may provide some clue as to the intent of the legislature relative to the implementation of a program, or it may indicate the existence of a report which may be useful to a researcher.

### ***Legislative Studies and Reports***

Legislative studies or reports are another source of information. Depending upon the subject matter in question, a researcher may want to contact special or interim committees, caucus and standing committee staffs, individual legislators, the House and Senate fiscal agencies, the Auditor General, the Law Revision Commission, the Uniform State Law Commission, as well as other legislative agencies for specific documents. The Library of Michigan, which maintains collections of such materials, may be able to locate a particular document. The Library of Michigan compiled ***Michigan Documents***, an index for legislative documents which may identify useful materials. The Library of Michigan may also be aware of executive agency reports such as those prepared by a governor’s task force or commission. One note of caution: generally, legislative reports or studies examine a particular issue rather than a specific bill and thus are indexed by subject rather than by bill or act number. The Library of Michigan’s on-line catalog, ***Answer***, is a useful source for background material and reports. The Research and Reference Collection of the Legislative Service Bureau also contains numerous legislative reports and documents.

Both the House Fiscal Agency and the Senate Fiscal Agency have prepared various reports and publications over the years providing background information on appropriation bills. Depending on the year, they may be able to provide helpful background on various state programs.

Potentially relevant information concerning the legislative history of a bill can also be found by identifying other bills which would have amended the same section of law, or which later did amend the section. Such bills may also be found in either previous or subsequent sessions of the legislature. Any bill analyses for these bills may refer to the amendment in question.

### ***Bill Analyses***

Bill analyses, which typically include a description of the problem being addressed, arguments for and against, and other background information on legislation, can be informative although they are **not official statements of legislative intent**. Bill analyses are prepared by state departments and agencies, the House Legislative Analysis Section (517/373-6466), and the Legislative Analysis Unit of the Senate Fiscal Agency (517/373-5383). The House Legislative Analysis Section and the Legislative Analysis Unit of the Senate Fiscal Agency prepare summaries of bills when they are taken up in committee and more detailed analyses of bills as they are reported from committee, amended, passed by either house, substituted, and/or enrolled. Analyses may also be prepared by other legislative agencies, including the House Fiscal Agency (517/373-8080) and by legislative caucus staffs. The Library of Michigan (517/373-1300) and the State Law Library (517/373-0630) maintain an analysis collection dating from 1969, with some analyses available for 1968. These analyses were prepared by various state departments and agencies as well as by the House Analysis Section (1973 to present) and the Legislative Analysis Unit of the Senate Fiscal Agency (1980 to the present). House Analysis Section and Senate Fiscal Agency summaries and analyses for bills of the current session can be found on [www.mileg.org](http://www.mileg.org).

### ***Other Sources of Information***

Nongovernmental information may be valuable to a research effort. Newspaper accounts, Gongwer News Service’s ***Michigan Report***, Michigan Information & Research Service’s ***Legislative Report***, the ***Michigan Bar Journal***, and law journal articles are examples of such materials. ***Michigan Report*** is also available through on-line subscription from September 1993 to the present and is searchable by keywords. Libraries maintaining ***Michigan Report*** may also

have a paper index covering articles from 1993 to present. If an issue has been in the news recently, this may quickly provide background or explanatory material. Consulting a newspaper index for articles in the year that the legislation was passed may also provide information. Some newspapers are also accessible through computer terminals. The Library of Michigan, for example, has the ***Detroit Free Press*** and ***The Detroit News*** on CDs. This can be a quick method to search a sizable amount of material. A researcher may also find it useful to contact specific lobbying groups which may have been involved in the passage of legislation, as these groups may have compiled and retained information on a particular issue or bill.

Another source of information may be found in **Attorney General Opinions**. Cumulative indices are available at various libraries throughout the state. Attorney General opinions from 1977 to the present are available at the Attorney General's home page (<http://www.ag.state.mi.us>). A check of library holdings, especially if such holdings are on-line, may unearth even more information. The Library of Michigan is an excellent source for such materials (<http://www.libofmich.lib.mi.us>).

In addition to the preceding sources, it may be helpful to contact the legislators who sponsored the bill. Sponsors may have retained or may be aware of the location of reports and press releases relating to the legislation in question. Also, a legislator's personal recollection may provide valuable insight. State or local agencies that administer an act can also be helpful. Government agencies may have rules, regulations, policies, or guidelines designed to implement a law. The ***Michigan Administrative Code*** is available online through the Office of Regulatory Reform (ORR) via ORR's web site (<http://www.state.mi.us/execoff/orr>.) They may also have retained reports or analyses developed by that agency dealing with a bill. Annual reports of executive departments and agencies also may contain very useful information.

The State Archives maintains a file containing the donated records of various state officials. Circular No. 39, ***Records of Politicians***, available at the State Archives, lists, in alphabetical order, the names of the officials who have donated their papers over the years. It also denotes the years covered by the donated papers. Circular No. 14 lists, by topic, the records of various special legislative committees held by the State Archives. Circulars 17 and 18 list the standing committees of the House and Senate, respectively, which have turned over their records to the State Archives. They also denote the two-year sessions of the Legislature for which these records are maintained.

A complete review of all of the sources in this publication can be a very time-consuming exercise. In many instances, however, it can reveal insightful information concerning the purposes for the passage of a bill.