Researching Federal Legislative History

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Importance of Legislative History

- Interpretation of statutory provisions
  - Poor drafting
  - Ambiguous language
  - Passage of time
  - Legislative intent is determinative

Conducting Legislative History

- Identify, locate and obtain relevant documents
- Analyze the documents
  - Congressional bills
  - Congressional hearings
  - Congressional committee reports
  - Congressional committee prints/re-prints
  - Congressional debates
  - Presidential signing & veto statements
What's REALLY important?

- Bill variations
- Committee reports
  - House
  - Senate
  - Joint
- Hearings
  - Witnesses are partisan advocates
  - Watch for disinterested objective testimony

What's sometimes helpful?

- Committee Prints/Re-Prints
  - Usually accompany a committee report
  - Studies
  - Views of committee members
- Congressional debates
  - Congressional Record
- Presidential information
  - Signing statement
  - Remarks (Sign or Veto)

Legislative History Strategies
Use the code to find the session law(s)

7 U.S.C. § 4209
Our Session Laws

- P.L. 97-98 (created statute)
  Title XV, Subtitle I, §1548
  95 Stat. 1344
  Dec. 22, 1981

- P.L. 99-198 (amended statute)
  Title XII, Subtitle F, § 1255(b)
  99 Stat. 1518
  Dec. 23, 1985

Let's get the bill numbers

- Lexis (97 P.L. 98)
- Westlaw (P.L. 97-98)
- GPO Access
- Thomas
- HeinOnline
- Google

What next?
Look for a Compiled History

- Hein Online
- Lexis
- Westlaw
- Lexis Congressional
- Web (Google it)
- Print sources (Worldcat.org)
DIY – But where do I look?

U.S.C.C.A.N. (print & online Westlaw)
GPO Access
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html
Thomas
http://thomas.loc.gov/
Lexis
Westlaw
Congressional

More help

Even More help

• CALI Lessons

• Law Librarians' Society of Washington D.C.
  http://www.llsd.org/sourcebook/
Ask Questions

Gulfport Reference Desk
727-562-7921

Tampa Reference Desk
813-228-6625 ext. 7540

Toll-free – 866-391-3221

E-mail: lawrefgp@law.stetson.edu

Contact information for individual librarians is available on the library’s web page.