

Finding Federal Laws at the Flint Public Library

Print and Online Resources

ABOUT FEDERAL LAWS:

A bill or resolution in the House of Representatives or Senate is a proposed law. When a bill or resolution is introduced, committees and members of Congress debate and revise it. Once both houses approve the bill, it is sent to the President, who can either sign it into law or veto it. Once the law is either signed, or 10 days elapse without the President's signature, or both houses of Congress override a veto, the bill becomes a Public Law or Private Law. Most Public Laws alter or amend various titles, chapters, and sections in the *United States Code*, the official source of federal law. Most Private Laws only affects specific people.

SOURCES OF FEDERAL LAWS:

PRINT SOURCES:

- **The United States Code (USC)** (345.2 US, in the Law Aisle) is a multi-volume set organized by 50 titles. It is the official federal law of the United States. The printed *Code* has extra volumes containing useful tools such as "Acts Cited by Popular Name," "Statutes at Large," annual supplements, and a general index. The Library currently owns the 2000 addition, with current supplements.
- **United States Statutes at Large** (345.2 US, in the Law Aisle) is a multi-volume set organized by sessions of Congress. Each volume (often broken into several parts) contains the bills, Public Laws, Private Laws, resolutions, and proclamations enacted during that session of Congress. Volumes also contain a popular name index and a subject index. The Library currently owns the volumes covering 1947-2003.
- **Slip Laws** (in the Law Aisle) are unbound paper prints of recent laws (Public Laws and Private Laws), and corrections to the **United States Statutes at Large**. They contain the most recent laws enacted, that have not yet been entered into a bound volume of the **United States Statutes at Large**.
- **Shepard's Acts and Cases by Popular Name, Federal and State** (345 Sh, in the Law Aisle) lists laws by their popular names and P.L. numbers.

ONLINE SOURCES:

- **GPO Access: Public and Private Laws (GPO: PL)** at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/plaws/index.html>, which contains Public Laws and Private Laws enacted during the 104th Congress (1995) and later. From the Government Printing Office.
- **GPO Access: United States Code (GPO: USC)** at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/index.html>. This site contains the entire United States Code, and is searchable by U.S. Code Citation, popular name, Public Law number, and Statutes at Large citation. From the Government Printing Office.
- **Thomas: Legislative Information on the Internet (Thomas)** at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. This site has Public Laws enacted during the 93rd Congress (1973) and later. It also contains the text of bills from the 101st Congress (1989) and later, as well as description of legislative action under consideration in the House during the current week and current legislative day. From the Library of Congress.
- **Statutes at Large** at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsl.html>. This site contains the first eighteen volumes of United States Statutes at large, which cover the first forty-three Congresses (1789-1875). From the Library of Congress.

HOW TO FIND FEDERAL LAW ON A TOPIC:

- Use the **USC** general index. Each subject listing will direct you to specific titles, chapters, and sections of the actual Code where that subject is covered.
- For recent laws (see dates above), search on **GPO: PL** (online source) by keywords. You must select which Congress to search, but you can select more than one at a time by holding down the Ctrl key while selecting. You can read the text of Public Laws on the site, and go to step 3.
- For laws on a topic during a specific session of Congress, use the **United States Statutes at Large** volume that covers that session, or **Statutes at Large** (online source, see dates above). In the back of each part of the volume there is a subject index referencing the various laws enacted relating to that subject.

HOW TO FIND A FEDERAL LAW BY POPULAR NAME:

- Use **GPO: PL** (online source) for laws since 1995, to get the P.L. Number. Once you have the number, you can read the text of the law online.
- Use **Shephard's Acts and Cases by Popular Names, Federal and State** (through August, 2004) to find the P.L. number.
- Use the "Acts Cited by Popular Name" in the **United States Code**. The entries will tell you the P.L. Number, and the main area of the Code affected, if any.
- For laws during a specific session of Congress, use the **United States Statutes at Large** volume that covers that session, or **Statutes at Large** (online source, see dates above). In the back of each part of the volume, is a popular name index covering all the laws in that part that have popular names.

HOW TO FIND A FEDERAL LAW BY BILL OR RESOLUTION NUMBER:

H.R.	5207
↑	↑
House of Representatives	Bill number
H.J.Res.	122
↑	↑
House Joint Resolution	Resolution number
S.	1533
↑	↑
Senate	Bill number
S.J.Res.	32
↑	↑
Senate Joint Resolution	Resolution number

- Use the **United States Statutes at Large** volume covering the Congress when the bill became a law, or use **Statutes at Large** (online source, see dates above). In the front of each part of the volume, there is a table listing each bill number and the corresponding Public Law or Private Law number.

- Use **Thomas** (online source) to find the text of bills from the 101st Congress (1989) and later or to find a summary and the status of bills from the 93rd Congress (1973) and later. These will also include information about the bill becoming law. Also use “Search Bill Text” for bills in the current Congress, and “House Floor Now” and “House Floor This Week” for bills currently under debate in the House of Representatives.

HOW TO FIND A FEDERAL LAW BY PUBLIC LAW NUMBER:

P.L. 107 - 042



Public Law Congress that enacted it Consecutive number in that Congress

- Use the **United States Statutes at Large** volume covering the session of Congress that enacted the law. The front of each part of the volume will contain a list of Public Laws enacted during that session, with their corresponding statute numbers. Included on the indicated page is the complete text of the law as it was enacted. Or use **Statutes at Large** (online source, see dates above), in the same manner.
- For recent laws (see dates above), use **GPO: PL** (online source). Select the appropriate Congress (using the first three numbers of the Public Law), and put the public law number in quotes, removing extra zeroes (for example, “public law 107-42”). The text will be the law as it was passed, including references to affected or amended sections of the USC.
- For recent laws (see dates above), use **Thomas** (online source). Select the appropriate Congress (using the first three numbers of the Public Law), and browse through the list for that law, cited by Public Law number. The text will include a bill summary and status, sponsors’ names, titles of the law, and the committees that discussed the law.
- The **USC** includes a “Statutes at Large” table (currently available 1789-2000). Look up the Public Law, first by Congress, then by number, to see which titles, chapters, and sections of the Code it affects.
- You can view specific titles and chapters of the actual **USC** either in print form or online through **GPO: USC** (online source).

HOW TO FIND A FEDERAL LAW BY PRIVATE LAW NUMBER:

Pvt.L. 107 - 003



Private Law Congress that enacted it Consecutive number in that Congress

- Use the **United States Statutes at Large** volume covering the session of Congress that enacted the law. The front of each part of the volume will contain a list of Private Laws enacted during that session, with their corresponding statute numbers. Included on the indicated page is the complete text of the law as it was enacted. Or use **Statutes at Large** (online source, see dates above) in the same manner.
- For recent laws (see dates above), use **GPO:PL** (online source). Select the appropriate Congress (using the first three numbers of the Private Law), and put the law number in quotes, removing extra zeroes (for example, “private law 107-4”).

HOW TO FIND A FEDERAL LAW BY STATUTE NUMBER:

116 STAT. 820



Volume United States Statute at Large Page number

- Locate the appropriate volume of **United States Statutes at Large**. Within that

volume, the law will begin on the page indicated. The text of the law is included as it was enacted. Headings, margin notes, and footnotes make reference to the bill or resolution numbers, the popular name, the date enacted, and the legislative history. **Statutes at Large** (online resource) has the same information, for the date range listed above.

- Use **GPO:PL** (online source) for recent laws (see dates above). Click on the Congress that enacted the law, then put the statute number in quotes (for example “117 stat 7”). The text will always start at the beginning of the law, even if you enter a statute number that refers to a page in the middle of the law.

HOW TO FIND THE MOST RECENT AMENDMENTS TO A FEDERAL LAW:

- Always check the copyright dates (on the back side of the title page) for the edition of the **USC** you are using. Since new versions of the **USC** are only published every 6 years, you must check for more recent amendments.
- When using the printed version of the **USC**, make sure to check the annual supplements, included in the last volumes of the **USC**. These supplements update the Code, and also include “Acts Cited by Popular Name,” a table of Statutes-at-Large, and a general index.
- Check in **GPO:USC** (online source). Recent Public Laws that affect that section of the Code will be referenced at the top of the page. Then read those Public Laws in **GPO:PL** (online source).
- For recent laws (see dates above), use **Thomas** (online source). The summary of the bill or law will include a link to any amendments.
- Use the “Search Bill Text” for the most recent Congress in **Thomas** online source, to see if any current bills have affected or may affect the law.
- Look at the Flint Public Library’s collection of **Slip Laws**. Browse through them to see if any recent laws cover the same topics, or if there are any notices of errors in the law as published in **United States Statutes at Large**.