

GUIDE SERIES 1 – FEDERAL RESEARCH



Guide #1A - FINDING CURRENT FEDERAL LEGISLATION

I. ORDER OF PUBLICATION

A. SLIP LAWS - The first official publication of federal legislation. Each act is issued individually as a slip of paper or pamphlet. There are two types of laws passed by Congress: private laws (pertaining only to the benefit of an individual or group) and public laws. Though these items have equal status as law, researchers are rarely concerned with private laws because of their limited applicability.

1. NUMBERING - Public laws are numbered in consecutive order starting anew with each congress. The citation for a new law is prefixed by the number of the Congress during which the law is enacted.

Example: Public Law 96-272 (P.L. 96-272) was the 272nd law passed during the 96th Congress. It was passed in 1980 during the 2nd session of that Congress.

2. PUBLICATION - Slip laws are published as separate pieces by the government. They are available from the Government Printing Office at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action>. A researcher can also locate recent legislation in the advance sheets of *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News* (discussed below) within a few weeks of passage. In addition, many topical loose-leaf services reprint legislation within a few days of passage.

B. SESSION LAWS - Slip laws are bound in chronological order after the close of the session of Congress in which they are enacted. They can be found in the following publications:

1. UNITED STATES STATUTES-AT-LARGE (Call# KF 50 A2) - The official compilation of public and private laws, the *Statutes-at-Large* volumes are issued by the federal government at the end of each session of Congress. Legislation is arranged in chronological order in each volume by public or private law number. Because publication of the slip laws may lag behind by some months, researchers frequently prefer using unofficial compilations such as the *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News*. But, regardless of which set is used, researchers citing to a piece of legislation in the session laws must make reference to the official compilation.

2. UNITED STATES CODE CONGRESSIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS (USCCAN)(Call# KF48 U55) - An unofficial publication issued by West Publishing, this set reprints the public laws issued during each session of Congress. Researchers prefer using this set because legislation is made available quickly through advance sheet pamphlets. Also included are congressional materials useful for investigating legislative intent. That portion reprinting public laws uses the same page numbers as eventually found in the *Statutes-at-Large* while the legislative history pages are numbered separately. Subject indexes and tables of sections affected are included in

each pamphlet and in the bound volumes. The official cite is found in the margin of the text and in Table 2 at the end of each annual compilation and advance sheet pamphlet.

C. CODES - Because researchers would be unable to easily determine the current status of a piece of legislation simply by examining each volume of the session laws, statutes are published in subject arrangements. These statutory compilations include only those statutes in effect at the time of publication. These compilations are updated in a variety of ways to assure access to the latest revisions of the legislation under investigation.

1. UNITED STATES CODE (Call# KF 62 year A2) - This publication is the official compilation of laws and is published by the federal government. It is issued every six years and contains only the legislation in effect at the time of publication. The *U.S. Code* is divided into 50 broad subject areas called "titles." Each title is then subdivided into narrower topics called "sections" which are designated by the symbol "§" (Example: Title 29 deals with the broad topic of labor and §185 of that title deals with "suits by and against labor organizations.") Bound supplement volumes are issued each year for updating. Sections on particular topics can be found by using the subject index or one of the tables which indicate where particular public laws are located in the Code.

2. UNITED STATES CODE ANNOTATED (USCA) (Call# KF 62 1927 W45) - Issued by West Publishing, this unofficial version of the Code is arranged in the same order (titles and sections) as the official version. However, it is easier to use and it is frequently updated by pocket parts and pamphlets containing recent changes in the law. It also contains annotations for further research including references to cases interpreting the section. Also included are key numbers for use in West's various digests and reference to other sets. A subject index, various cross-reference tables, and a table of legislation by popular name are also included.

3. UNITED STATES CODE SERVICE (USCS) (Call# KF 62.A3 L38) - Issued by Lawyer's Co-operative, this unofficial version of the Code is also arranged by title and section. As with the U.S.C.A., it is frequently updated and so is easier to use than the official version of the Code. This annotated set does not contain as many references to cases as *U.S.C.A.* However, it does list selected major cases. It also includes references to many other sets and lists of relevant *Code of Federal Regulation* sections. A subject index, various cross-reference tables, and a table of acts by popular name are also included.

II. SAMPLE CITATIONS

A. ABBREVIATIONS

Public Law: P.L. 96-272

U.S. Statutes-at-Large: 94 Stat. 500

United States Code Congressional & Administrative News:

1980 U.S. Code Cong. & Ad. News 1448

United States Code: 42 U.S.C. §602

United States Code Annotated: 42 U.S.C.A. §602

United States Code Service: 42 U.S.C.S. §602

B. EXPLANATION OF SAMPLE CITATIONS

The sample citation above, the *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980*, P.L. 96-272, was the 272nd law passed in the 96th Congress. It was published in volume 94 of the *Statutes-at-Large* at page 500. That cite can also be used to locate the act in the *U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News*. Materials useful for developing a legislative history are located in the 1980 volumes of the U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News at page 1448. Portions of the law appear throughout the U.S. Code, but by using the tables in that set which show where specific laws can be found in the Code, one finds that part of the 1980 Act can be found in section 602 of Title 42. The same title and section can be used to find the same text in either the *U.S. Code Annotated* or the *U.S. Code Service*.

III. ELECTRONIC ACCESS

A. PUBLIC LAWS

Current federal legislation may be found on the Government Printing Office site at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action>.

Public laws are available on Lexis (Legis Library) and on Westlaw (US-PL and US-PS-OLD). Public laws from the current and previous two Congresses are available in "Thomas", the Library of Congress's legislative Internet site, <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

B. UNITED STATES CODE

The current U.S. code can be found both on Lexis (Genfed Library, USCS file) and on Westlaw (USCA database). In addition, you can access the U.S. Code on the Internet via GPO-Access <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/index.html>.

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