

## Guide to Locating Public Laws

Once a bill is passed into law, it is assigned a public law number. A public law number looks like this: P.L. 103-123. "P.L." is the abbreviation for public law. In this instance, the "103" indicates that this bill was enacted during the 103th Congress. The "123" indicates that this was the 123<sup>rd</sup> bill to have been passed into law during that legislative session. Public laws can be very helpful for legal research because this is often the last time that a bill that has become a law will appear all in one place.

To see public laws on the Web from the 93d Congress (1973) forward - via Thomas: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

### **Part 1. Searching for a Public Law by number:**

#### **A. Statutes at Large**

Public Laws are published by the Government Printing Office in the *Statutes at Large*. The citation form for the *Statutes at Large* is similar to the citation form of the case reporters. For example, 112 Stat 257. The "112" is the volume number, "Stat" is the recognized abbreviation for the US Statutes at Large and "257" would be the page number. This set began in 1846, but the statutes were published retrospectively beginning with the first Congress. There is a subject index in each volume.

Often, public laws will have two citations listed together. For example, 1112 Stat 257, 104 P.L. 231. This is what's known as a "parallel citation," meaning, there are two places listed where one can find the same materials. The United States Statutes at Large is not available via the Web. Microfiche for volumes 1-96 are in the collection. HeinOnline (<http://www.heinonline.org>) has .PDFs for all retrospective volumes

#### **B. United States Code**

This is the official codified version of the federal laws of the United States. A federal law is "codified" after it is enacted by breaking it down into sections. This means that once a public law is enacted, it will generally be divided into sections. These sections are then put into different places in the USC. The USC is cited accordingly: 14 USC 1234. The "14" would be the title of the volume, the "USC" is the abbreviation for the United States Code and the "1234" would be the section number. See separate Research Guide for more information on this resource.)

Via GPO Access: (1994, & Supplements 1-5 and 2000):  
<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/multidb.html>

Via Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute:  
<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/>

#### **C. United States Code Service (USCS)**

The USCS advance pamphlets include public laws. See separate Research Guide for more information on this resource.)

#### **D. US Code Congressional And Administrative News (USCCAN).**

*USCCAN* includes the full text of public laws, beginning with 1952. It also includes a partial legislative history of the laws. (See separate Research Guide for more information on this resource.)

### **Part 2. Searching for a Public Law by title or popular name:**

The following publications have tables in which public laws can be looked up by their popular names (e.g. Naturalization Act).

A. *Shepard's Acts and Cases by Popular Names*

B. *United States Code Annotated (USCA)*

C. *United States Code Service (USCS)*

D. *Statutes at Large*