

Legislative History Project – Senate Bill 1967

Introduction

I compiled legislative history for An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services, Senate Bill 1967 (formerly Senate Bill 607). I used various methods including telephone communication, email communication and extensive Internet research. All of the methods proved to be effective in their own ways, and troublesome in their own ways. I began the project first by searching how to gather legislative history on Google. I was rewarded with a link to the Massachusetts Statehouse Library,¹ where I found a comprehensive guide to legislative history. After perusing that document and other websites that were instructive on searching for legislative history I began my search.

Successes

Using the Internet to search for legislative history was very effective. I used Westlaw to find the House and Senate Journals as well as the older versions of the bill. I tailored my search parameters to only proposed and enacted legislation in Massachusetts and used the bill's name as the search term. From there I found several results. I also used a regular Google search to find testimony and any other related documents. While the search results varied in relevance according to search terms, I was able to obtain several pieces of testimony. The most effective search phrase was the bill's title combined with the word "testimony." The bill number also worked well, but oftentimes the results that came back were varied, and tedious to filter. Finally, I browsed through the Massachusetts State Legislature's website. I was able to obtain the bill history, which I collated into one word document. The bill took several bill numbers as it

¹ <http://www.mass.gov/anf/research-and-tech/legal-and-legislative-resources/tracing-ma-law.html>

progressed through the Committees, and from various congress peoples' offices. It was useful to have already done preliminary research on Google to find out what the various bill numbers were because the different bill numbers were not linked together on the Legislature's website.

legiscan.com was a useful site that often listed the bill under its various bill numbers. I was also able to gather some legislative history from Statehousenews.com. The search engine on that website is not as sophisticated as the Google search engine, so the search terms I had to use were more tailored, for example using only the bill number, or a couple of words from the bill's title as a search phrase. As a result, I had to filter through a substantial amount of unrelated material.

One other successful search method was telephone communication. I called Senator Brewer's office (the Chair of the Committee on Ways and Means) – inquiring about any sort of investigative reports, but the woman on the phone said there were none, and referred me to the Committee's attorney. After a phone conversation with the attorney, he informed me that the Committee on Ways and Means merely wrote a redraft, and he forwarded me a copy of the redraft and bill summary. I also called Senator Eldridge's office (the Chair of the Committee on Housing) and was referred to their legislative director, whom I emailed.

Difficulties

I found that email communication was the least effective method to search for legislative history. I did not receive replies to many of my emails, including the two that I sent to Senator Eldridge's legislative director requesting information regarding any investigative reports on the bill. The woman from Senator Eldridge's office whom I had originally spoken with attributed the delay or lack of response to the upcoming bill in the Committee on Housing, and the budget. While I did receive some files via email, I would highly recommend phone or in-person

communication over email communication. One difficulty I had with using the Internet to search was gauging whether my search phrases had comprehensively covered the possibility of searching. While some search terms yielded several successful links in a row, others were ineffective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, given the opportunity or the necessity to search for legislative history again, I would begin by sending emails out first, so I could have plenty of time to follow-up and wait for replies. I would do a thorough Google search of the bill to find any of the possible bill numbers the bill was listed under, and to search for testimony. After obtaining the bill numbers and basic information, I would call the committees to see if any reports were available. From there, I would follow up again on email contacts and make sure that I have any available committee reports.