ProQuest Legislative Insight Basic Research Guide

A Joint Project of the Thomas Cooper Library and the Coleman Karesh Law Library at the University of South Carolina

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I. What is ProQuest Legislative Insight?

ProQuest Legislative Insight (Legislative Insight), a sister database to ProQuest Congressional, provides a quick and easy way to access the legislative history associated with a specific United States bill or law. Instead of having to pull the pieces of the legislative history together by searching through individual Congressional materials, the legislative histories available through Legislative Insight have already been compiled by ProQuest staff members.¹ These legislative histories cover public laws from 1929 to the present, and are generally more extensive than the legislative histories that are available through ProQuest Congressional.² However, because Legislative Insight is not scheduled to be completed until the end of 2012, you may find that you need to consult the legislative histories and other materials in ProQuest Congressional if the legislative history for the particular law you are researching is not available in Legislative Insight.³

Infrequent researchers of Congressional information who are simply seeking to quickly access a legislative history for a law may find this database easier to use than Congressional. Legislative histories are easily accessible through the “Citation Checker” feature and the “Popular Names of Laws List” feature (each of which is discussed in detail later in this Guide). Additionally, users who are unclear about the legislative process will benefit from Legislative Insight’s graphical interface, which allows you to merely click on a specific part of the legislative process to obtain the sections of the legislative history that were generated during that part of the legislative process.

II. The ProQuest Legislative Insight Basic Research Guide

This Basic Research Guide highlights the most useful features available through Legislative Insight. If you are interested in the intricacies of legislative history or if you need an explanation of the more complicated features of Legislative Insight, you should consult our ProQuest Legislative Insight Advanced Research Guide.

Although this Basic Research Guide contains example searches to illustrate how Legislative Insight can be used to quickly retrieve legislative history and Congressional information, these examples are only *some* of the ways to search Legislative Insight. To obtain all the information you need on an issue, you may need to use a variety of search terms or phrases to ensure that you receive as many relevant documents as possible.4

III. A Brief Overview of the Legislative Process

Before you begin researching with Legislative Insight, a brief background on the legislative process is helpful. The legislative process generally begins when an issue arises and it is determined that introducing a bill is the best way to address that issue.5 Members of Congress are the only persons who can introduce a bill into Congress, but bills may be suggested and drafted by anyone, including Congressional aides, lobbyists, constituents, or the President.6 Bills must be introduced during a House or Senate daily session, at which time the House or Senate Bill Clerk provides the bill number and it is determined whether the bill should be referred to a committee, held at the desk, or placed on the calendar.7 If a bill is held at the desk or placed on the calendar, it means that the bill can be considered

4 Only the relevant portions of those images have been included due to space limitations. All search results included as examples are accurate as of March 2012.


7 ProQuest, LLC. (2012). Legislative histories. Retrieved from
by a full Chamber of Congress at anytime. Most bills are referred to a committee or a subcommittee for consideration or suppression. If a hearing is held on a bill at a committee or subcommittee level, testimony is taken from witnesses and other discussion occurs about the fate of a bill.

If a committee votes to report a bill, a committee report is drafted and filed with the House or Senate clerk. A reported version of the bill is drafted with any changes to the text from the original version of the bill. Committee reports usually contain the text of the bill as amended and reported, as well as the text of the bill as it would appear if it passes into law. The full House or Senate can consider a bill that has been referred to a committee once the committee report is filed. Next, both Chambers of Congress, where debate on the bill occurs, can consider the bill or offer amendments to the bill.

When either Chamber of Congress passes a bill, the bill is referred to the other Chamber and becomes an Act. The other Chamber must then decide whether to completely accept the original Chamber’s bill and send it to the President, or make changes to the original Chamber’s bill and send it back to that Chamber. If the original Chamber receives a bill back from the other Chamber, it may either

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accept the changes made by the other Chamber and send the bill to the President, make more changes to the bill and send the revised bill back to the other Chamber, or demand that the original bill language be kept intact and request a conference.\textsuperscript{16} If a conference occurs and both Chambers agree to compromise on the language of an Act, a conference report\textsuperscript{17} is issued.\textsuperscript{18} If both the House and Senate vote to accept the conference report, the bill goes to the President.\textsuperscript{19}

An Act approved by both Chambers of Congress goes to the President, who has ten days to sign the bill into law, veto the bill, or take no action on the bill.\textsuperscript{20} If the President signs the bill into law, it becomes law and the President may include a signing statement.\textsuperscript{21} If the President decides to veto the bill, it is returned to Congress and Congress can either accept the veto or override it with a 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} vote of House and Senate members (each Chamber) present and voting.\textsuperscript{22} If either Chamber does not override the veto, the bill goes no further.\textsuperscript{23} Finally, if the President takes no action on the bill and Congress is still in session, the bill becomes law.\textsuperscript{24} If the President takes no action on a bill and Congress has adjourned for the session, the bill is vetoed.\textsuperscript{25} Once a law is passed, the law is assigned a Public Law

\textsuperscript{17} ProQuest, LLC. (2012). Legislative histories. Retrieved from http://www.conquest-leg-insight.com/legislativeinsight/LegislativeInsightHelp.jsp#legislativeProcess
\textsuperscript{18} This conference report is available as a House report and is published in the Congressional Record.
\textsuperscript{22} ProQuest, LLC. (2012). Legislative histories. Retrieved from http://www.conquest-leg-insight.com/legislativeinsight/LegislativeInsightHelp.jsp#legislativeProcess
number, printed as a slip law, compiled chronologically in the *Statutes at Large*, and codified by topic in the United States Code.\(^{26}\)

**IV. What Publications Are Usually Included in a Legislative History?**

Legislative histories help researchers to better understand why a bill was introduced and interpret statutory language. Several different types of Congressional publications may be part of a legislative history, but not every type of Congressional publications is part of the legislative history for every law. The more important Congressional publications that may be part of a legislative history are as follows:

- **House and Senate Reports**

  These are reports and recommendations from House or Senate committees to the entire House or Senate.\(^{27}\) Conference committee reports are particularly useful for legislative history analysis because these are created when differing versions of a bill need to be reconciled into a compromised bill between the House and Senate. Reports are designated by “H. Rpt.” or “S. Rpt.”\(^{28}\)

- **Committee hearings**

  Committee hearings include transcripts of testimony from experts and witnesses, reports, exhibits, correspondence and other information designed to help Congressional committees gather information on an issue are included in the committee hearings through Congressional.\(^{29}\)

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The Congressional Record

Debates on bills, as well as other remarks and statements from Members of Congress that occur on the House or Senate floor, can also provide researchers with an understanding of arguments made in favor of or against a piece of legislation. Transcripts of this activity can be found in the Congressional Record. The Congressional Record is the official documentation of proceedings and debates on the Congressional floor. Each day’s proceedings are published in the Daily Edition of the Congressional Record, and at the end of the Congressional session, these are compiled into the Permanent, Bound edition of the Congressional Record. There is usually a substantial delay (i.e., several years) between the end of a Congressional session and the publication of the Permanent edition for that session, so researchers may only be able to find information on recent Congressional floor activity in the Daily Edition.

Text of Bills

The text of the legislation itself provides important insight for federal legislative history researchers, particularly in determining legislative intent. Legislative Insight provides the text of enacted bills, plus related bills for federal legislative research.

House and Senate Documents

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House and Senate Documents include documents provided to the full House and Senate chambers or Congressional committees, Presidential veto messages or messages proposing legislation and other information. They are designated by “H. Doc.” or “S. Doc.”

- **Presidential Signing Statements**

Presidential signing statements are issued by the President when signing a bill into law. Presidential signing statements are considered controversial by some, particularly when used for substantive purposes, but they can provide researchers with important background and context for the law being researched.

V. Where Do I Begin My Search?

Where you begin with Legislative Insight depends on the type of information you are seeking. Click on one of the links below to go to the appropriate section of this Guide based on the information you would like to find.

- **I want to find the legislative history of a law using a citation to the law.**
- **I want to find information about a law using the Popular Name of the law.**
- **I want to find the legislative history of a law or Congressional documents related to a law using search terms.**
- **I want to find Congressional documents related to a law using a citation to the law.**
- **I want to find Congressional publications related to a law that was created during a specific stage of the legislative process.**

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• I have retrieved a legislative history and now I need more information.

VI. Searching for a Legislative History Using a Citation to a Law

Using the Citation Checker feature of Legislative Insight, you can enter a law’s Public Law number, Statutes at Large citation, or Enacted Bill number to find the legislative history for that law.39

• Public Laws – A passed bill or joint resolution that affects the public.40

• Statutes at Large – A compilation of all public and private laws, in order of enactment.41

• Enacted Bill – The bill number associated with a piece of enacted legislation.42

For laws not covered in the Legislative Insight database, you can search ProQuest Congressional for individual Congressional publications that may provide legislative background.

EXAMPLE:

1. To research the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act of 1997 with the law’s Public Law number (P.L. 105-41), enter “105-41” or “PL105-41” in the first Citation Checker box, as shown below. If the legislative history is available through Legislative Insight, the Citation Checker box will be automatically updated with the other two types of citations to the law.

2. Once the citation is entered into the box, you can click on “Go to Legislative History” to view the legislative history for the law.

VII. Searching for a Legislative History Using the Popular Name of a Law

If you know the Popular Name of a law, you can use Legislative Insight to find the legislative history of that law and Congressional publications related to that law. For example, many members of the public are familiar with the Fair Housing Act, but may not know the Public Law number or Statutes at Large citation associated with the Act. Using Legislative Insight’s Popular Names of Laws List, you could search for “Fair Housing Act” and find the legislative history of the law.

From the Legislative Insight main page, you can access the Popular Names of Laws List by clicking the link under the search box. This opens an alphabetical list of popular names of laws that you can scroll through. Alternatively, you can enter the Popular Name of the law into the search box and click the magnifying glass to find the law.
**Note:** Asterisks appear beside the popular names of laws for which the legislative history is available in Legislative Insight.\(^3\)

- **EXAMPLE:** A user is searching for the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

1. The user could scroll to the “H’s” in the Popular Names of Laws List. The user may find that there are several versions of an Act referenced (e.g., one for each reauthorization of the Act or for the amendments to an Act), so he would need to review each version separately.

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2. By highlighting the appropriate Act, the Popular Name is placed in the search box. The user would then click on the magnifying glass to access the legislative history for the Act.

3. The user may find that there is more than one legislative history listed for a particular law. This is because the legislative history for one law may reference other laws in some way. The Results title will tell the user which legislative history corresponds to the law he is researching.\(^4\)

Search results obtained from the Popular Names of Laws List can be refined through a full-text search by entering search terms in the text box above the results.

\(^4\) Search results are current as of March 2012.
VIII. Using Search Terms to Find a Legislative History or Congressional Documents

If you do not have a citation or a Popular Name for a law, you can use search terms to find relevant legislative histories and Congressional documents using the Quick Search and Guided Search Forms.  

A. Using the Quick Search Form

You can get to the Quick Search Form by clicking “Quick Search” on the main Legislative Insight page.

When you type your search terms into the search box. Legislative Insight will provide suggested search terms to help you with your search.

B. Quick Search Form Search Example

The following examples will give you a better idea of how to use the Quick Search Form.

- **EXAMPLE 1**: A medical researcher is looking for all available Congressional publications about “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome” or “AIDS.”

1. In this case, the medical researcher may get drastically different results depending on how he searches Legislative Insight. If the researcher enters “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome” in the search box, he will get only 16 results.\(^\text{46}\)

2. However, if the researcher searches for “AIDS,” he will get many more results, most of which are irrelevant to the topic of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Therefore, you must be careful when using acronyms to search for information. However, subject terms and other documents listed when the researcher types in the acronym “AIDS” could help the researcher target his results to more relevant documents.

\(^{46}\) Search results are current as of March 2012.
C. Using the Guided Search Form

Using the Guided Search Form, you can create a more detailed search for legislative histories. The Guided Search Form can be accessed by clicking “Guided Search” at the top of the main Legislative Insight page, and then entering search terms into the form.
Within each search box, you can enter search terms that can be searched within “All Fields excluding Full Text,” the “Title” of the Legislative History, or “Subject/Index Terms.” These options can be selected by highlighting the appropriate choice in the drop-down box.

- “All fields excluding Full Text” – Searches the summary information for a document for the search terms, instead of the entire text of a document.
- “All fields including Full Text” - Searches the summary information and the entire text of the document for the search terms.
- “Title” – Searches for the search terms in the title of the document.
“Subject/Index Terms” – Searches for subject or index terms that can be selected through Legislative Insight. Selecting this option opens a window that allows you to select subject and index terms in either the “Subject View” or “Thesaurus View”.

In the “Subject Term List,” view, you can type a word contained in a subject term or phrase in the “Search Subject Terms” box or view an alphabetical list of subject and index terms by choosing “Begins with.” You can also use the “Thesaurus View”, which helps you find related subject terms to add to a search.
D. Guided Search Form Search Examples

The following examples will help you better understand how to use the Guided Search Form.

- **EXAMPLE 1:** A user wants to research legislative histories related to federal civil rights laws, and is particularly interested in information on how literacy tests were used to prevent voting.

1. First, the user could enter “civil rights” in quotation marks in the first search box because she wants to retrieve legislative histories containing the exact phrase “civil rights.” She decides to search “All fields excluding Full Text” so that she retrieves only results where “civil rights” is a major subject of the document instead of just mentioned in the document.

2. In the second search box, the user types “literacy test” in quotation marks to include the phrase in the search. However, she selects “All fields including Full Text” for this box because she wants all documents that contain the phrase.
3. In the third search box, the user types the term “voting” and again selects “All fields including Full Text.” Because she is not sure exactly which dates or Congressional sessions would have the legislative histories she is looking for, she uses the default “Any Congress” option. Her completed search box looks like the one below, and yields 51 legislative histories. To find the most relevant results first, she selects “Relevance” as the sorting option.

4. If the user wanted to focus only on certain types of Congressional documents associated with the legislative histories she found, she could check the box next to the type of publication she wanted to focus on. For example, if she wanted to focus on the Congressional hearings related to her original search, she would check the box next to “Hearing” to narrow her original search.

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47 Search results are current as of March 2012.
EXAMPLE 2: A researcher would like to review Congressional hearings addressing the diamond trade in Sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Using the Guided Search Subject/Index Terms, the researcher could search by subject and index terms related to the search. When the researcher selects “Subject/Index Terms” from the drop-down box next to the first search box, the Subject/Index term window opens.
2. Next, the researcher can type the word “Africa” into the search box to find subject terms and phrases containing that word. The subject term “African, Sub-Saharan” is a subject term listed in four documents.
Once the researcher checks the box next to the subject term and clicks “Apply,” the subject term will appears in the first search box.

3. Next, the researcher adds the term “diamond” as the second part of the search.

4. The researcher’s search yields 8 Congressional hearings, which can be narrowed as the researcher desires.48

48 Search results are current as of March 2012.
E. Additional Features Available Through the Quick Search and Guided Search Forms

Legislative Insight also provides a variety of additional features that help you retrieve information that is more precise. These features are discussed in detail in our ProQuest Legislative Insight Advanced Research Guide.

- Using Connectors and Wildcard Characters

  Legislative Insight allows you to use the connectors “AND,” “OR,” or “NOT” to create a search. These connectors must be typed in uppercase to be properly processed within the search box. You can also use the term “NEAR” to search for records with two search terms that are within ten words of each other. A specific number can be entered to retrieve results with search terms closer or farther apart than ten words (e.g., “housing NEAR/20 discrimination”).

  Additionally, you can use asterisks (*) and question marks (?) as wildcard characters in your search. An asterisk (*) will replace more than one character and a question mark (?) will replace only one character within a word included in a search term, except for the first letter of the word. Asterisks can be used more than once in a word or at the end of a word.

  **EXAMPLE 1:** Typing “m*n” will retrieve results containing both “men” and “mountain.”

  **EXAMPLE 2:** Typing “explor?” will find results containing the word “explore”, but not “explorer” or “exploration.”

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Narrowing Results by Session of Congress

When you retrieve your search results, you have the option to narrow the search results by Congressional session. In the below results list, narrowing the results by the 107th Congressional session yields seven results, all of which have publications from the 107th Congress included as part of their legislative histories.  

Narrowing Results by Start and End Dates

Instead of narrowing results by Congressional session, you could narrow results by specific start and end dates by clicking “Start and End Dates.” Legislative Insight automatically populates these dates, but they can be changed by clicking on each date and selecting another date from the calendar.

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54 Search results are current as of March 2012.
Narrowing Results by Subject Terms and Areas of Practice

Subject terms and areas of practice can be used to narrow results from the search. Each of these categories is listed on the left-hand side of the search results list.

- Subject Terms – You can click on a subject term to open only those results that are related to that subject term.

- Areas of Practice – Similar to narrowing results by Subject Terms, you can narrow results by area of practice to see only results associated with a specific area of law.
IX. Finding a Congressional Publication by Citation

The Search By Number option in Legislative Insight allows you to search for specific congressional publications using the numbers associated with the publication. To use the Search by Number Form, you must first select a task from the two options allowed. These options are to “Find a Congressional Publication By Number” or “Find Congressional Publications Related to A Bill or Law.”

A. Search By Number – Find A Congressional Publication By Number

“Find a Congressional Publication by Number” lets you search for a congressional publication by the specific publication number. There are 12 types of publication numbers to search from. To search by publication number, select the type of document from the first drop-down box, the congressional session the document is from in the second drop-down box, and enter the publication number assigned to the document in the third box.
B. Search By Number – Find Congressional Publication Related to A Law

“Find Congressional Publication Related to A Law” allows you to search for Congressional documents that reference a law. You can search all types of Congressional publications for references to a specific bill number, a Public Law number, or a Statutes at Large citation.

- Bill Number

This option searches for documents by the bill number assigned to a specific piece of legislation when it is introduced in Congress. To search for publications referencing a specific bill number, select the number of the Congressional session from the first drop-down
box, the type of bill from the second drop-down box, and enter the bill number in the third box.

- **Public Law Number**

  This option searches for documents by the Public Law number assigned to a bill when it is passed in Congress. To use this option, select the number of the Congressional session from the first drop-down box, “PL” or “PR” (for “Public Law” or “Public Resolution”) from the second drop-down box, and enter the number in the third box.

- **Statutes at Large Citation**

  This option searches for documents by the *Statutes at Large* citation assigned to laws passed by Congress. To use this option, enter the first number from the *Statutes at Large* citation in the first box, and the second number from the *Statutes at Large* citation in the second box.

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X. Finding Congressional Publications from a Specific Part of the Legislative Process

Legislative Insight provides an easy-to-understand graphical interface that lets you search for Congressional publications created during a specific part of the legislative process for a law. By checking or removing checks from the appropriate boxes on the graphical interface, you can include or exclude certain documents. To access the Legislative Process interface, click “Legislative Process” from the main Legislative Insight page. Then, enter the Public Law number associated with a piece of legislation.

EXAMPLE: To find Congressional publications related to the E-Government Act of 2002 (P.L. 104-347) from the part of the legislative process in which House and Senate floor activity occurred, enter the Public Law number in the search box, and check only the boxes next to “House Floor Activity” and “Senate Floor Activity”.

To focus on a specific document in your results, click on “Publication Detail” underneath the document.  

58 Search results are current as of March 2012.
XI. Working with a Retrieved Legislative History

Because Legislative Insight focuses on the legislative history for a particular law, it is also helpful to understand what information Legislative Insight provides within its legislative histories. In Legislative Insight, the legislative history for each piece of legislation is divided into separate categories of documents comprising the legislative history. As you can see, the legislative history for a bill provides options for changing the order of documents in the legislative history, citation information, a summary of the legislation, subject terms describing the act, and the Congressional publications that are part of the legislative history (e.g., bills, entries from the Congressional Record, hearings, etc.). A portion of a sample legislative history through Legislative Insight is shown below.
Note that each legislative history is likely to include references to bills proposed in earlier Congressional sessions, as it may take many Congressional sessions to successfully pass a piece of legislation. Additionally, Legislative Insight allows you to change the display for a legislative history so that it can be viewed in chronological order or sorted by publication type. Additionally, each part of a legislative history is hyperlinked to the appropriate documents so that additional review can be done quickly.

A. Searching a Legislative History with Search Terms

Once you have retrieved a specific legislative history, you can enter search terms to search for specific terms within the legislative history displayed or to search for specific search terms in the full-text of the publications associated with the legislative history.

**EXAMPLE:** To search the legislative history display for the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act of 1997 for the word “stamps,” enter the word “stamps” in the “Find terms on this page” box. This will show you the number of times the search term is located in the legislative history display page, as well as highlight the location of each term on the display, as shown below:  

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60 Search results are current as of March 2012.
Alternatively, to search the publications associated the legislative history for the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act of the 1997 for the word “stamps,” enter the word in the “Find terms in full text publications” box. This will provide PDF links to each full-text publication containing the word “stamps” for easy review, as shown below.61

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61 Search results are current as of March 2012.
B. Excluding Documents from A Legislative History

You can omit certain types of Congressional publications from a legislative history by using the Publication Filter, as shown below. This option helps you focus on specific publications within your legislative history.
For more detailed information about using this option, please consult our ProQuest Legislative Insight Advanced Research Guide.

XII. Other Options through Legislative Insight

In addition to the search forms discussed previously, Legislative Insight provides a variety of other features that provide legislative background for users.

A. Content Coverage

Currently, not all major laws are covered in Legislative Insight. In fact, by the end of 2012, Legislative Insight will contain over 18,000 legislative histories, but only from 1929 to the present. However, in 2013, ProQuest plans to provide legislative histories for an undetermined number of pre-1929 laws. Therefore, researchers will want to verify that a specific legislative history is available in Legislative Insight before beginning the research process. On the main Legislative Insight page, a list of “Total Histories on Legislative Insight” is available. From this list, researchers can determine how many legislative histories are available from each Congressional session. When a researcher clicks on a specific session, a window opens that

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allows the researcher to scroll the list of Public Laws to determine what legislative histories are available.  

B. Other Options

Other options available from the Results list include the option to download PDF versions of documents, email and print search results, obtain the Bluebook citation for the document, and export citations to RefWorks or EndNote. This can be done from the Results list, as shown below.

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64 Image accurate as of May 2012.
65 The Bluebook is a citation style used by legal professionals in the United States.
66 RefWorks and Endnote are online management tools for bibliographic citations.
XIII. Where Can I Get More Information on Congressional Documents and Legislative Histories?

As explained in the introduction to this Guide, the Basic Research Guide provides an overview and brief explanation of the functions and features available through Legislative Insight. However, it would impossible to include all of the information that may be of interest to more sophisticated users in just one guide. Accordingly, users should consult the variety of guides on federal legislative history and Congressional documents available online. Of particular interest is the Legislative Source Book, which is available through the Law Librarians’ Society of Washington, D.C. and edited by Rick McKinney and Ellen Sweet.\(^69\) The Legislative Source Book includes the following guides:

- **Federal Legislative History Research: A Practitioner's Guide to Compiling the Documents and Sifting for Legislative Intent\(^70\)**

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- **Legislative History of Selected U.S. Laws on the Internet**\(^{71}\)
- **Electronic Sources for Federal Legislative History Documents with Years/Congresses Available**\(^{72}\)
- **An Overview of the Congressional Record and Its Predecessor Publications**\(^{73}\)
- **Questions and Answers in Legislative and Regulatory Research**\(^{74}\)

Additionally, ProQuest provides a variety of help features for Legislative Insight users, including the following:

- A [Help section](http://www.llsdc.org/Leg-Hist/) attached to the database
- [ProQuest’s Quick Start Guide](http://www.llsdc.org/attachments/wysiwyg/544/elec-leg-hist-docs.pdf) for Legislative Insight
- ProQuest [training videos and webinars](http://www.proquest.com/en-US/support/)

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