
Researching Ontario Bills and Statutes

207

Research Guide

Most Recent Update: March 2011

Ontario's laws — their origins and intent, the politicians championing them, and the way in which they have evolved — tell us a great deal about our roots and our changing values. The process of creating a new statute or changing an existing one starts with a bill. This research guide provides you with information on researching Ontario bills and statutes. It includes information on the relevant tools to help you with your research. You may also want to consult *Research Guide 219: Researching Ontario Regulations (1867 to the Present)*.

The guide covers the following topics:

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Part 1: Researching Bills..... | 2 |
| The records for researching bills | 3 |
| Part 2: Researching Statutes | 5 |
| How Statutes Are Organized..... | 5 |
| The Records for Researching Statutes | 6 |
| Other Resources for Researching Bills and Statutes..... | 7 |
| MAKING CONTACT..... | 8 |

All descriptions for records mentioned in this guide are available in our online Archives Descriptive Database. You will find the database and all guides mentioned in this guide in the “Start Your Research” section of our website.

Introduction

What Is a Bill?

A **bill** is a proposed act that is before the Legislative Assembly for consideration. In order for a bill to be enacted and become an act, it must receive three readings and be passed by the Legislative Assembly, and then receive Royal Assent (signature by the Lieutenant-Governor). During this process the bills often go to a “standing committee” (a committee of members of the legislature; e.g., the Standing Committee on Social Policy)

to be studied in detail. Bills are usually modified, sometimes extensively. They do not always become law.

What Is a Statute?

A **statute** is a bill that is passed by the Legislative Assembly after its Third Reading, receives Royal Assent, is enacted and becomes a law. The terms "statute" and "act" are interchangeable.

For more information on how Ontario's laws are created, visit the website of the Ontario legislature at <http://www.ontla.on.ca> and click on the "bills and lawmaking" link.

For more information on words and terms related to statutes, visit the Service Ontario website at <http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/> and click on the "Glossary" link.

Part 1: Researching Bills

Bills introduce a statute to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. There are three kinds of bills:

- **Government Bills** are introduced by Cabinet ministers. They usually affect all of Ontario. These bills are part of the government's legislative program.
- **Private Members' Public Bills** also deal with issues of public concern. They are introduced by any member of provincial parliament (MPP) from any party, who is not in the Cabinet.
- **Private Bills** are normally introduced by the member who represents the provincial riding that the bill concerns. These bills usually affect a particular individual or corporation.

1. To research any bill, you need to know its number and the year it was introduced. (Note: Bill numbering restarts every calendar year. For example, there is a Bill 1 in 2008 and a Bill 1 in 1994.)
2. Once you have the year that the bill was introduced, or if you are searching for a bill that never became a statute, consult the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario* (the *Journal*) and *Bills Ontario*. These two publications are available in the Archives Library. The *Statutes*, the *Journals*, and *Bills Ontario* are also available in other major libraries in Ontario.
3. Record the following information from the *Journal*:
 - the **kind** of bill it is: (a government bill, a private member's public bill or a private bill)
 - the **number** of the bill
 - the **dates** of the bill's introduction, first reading, second reading, and third reading
 - the name of the **individual** introducing the bill
 - the number and year of the **sessional paper**, if any, tabled at the bill's first reading

- which **committee**, if any, the bill was assigned to, and when it reported
 - whether the bill was **carried over** to the next session.
4. If the bill was carried over to another session, it may have been assigned a new number and year. Check the appropriate *Journal* and record the information indicated above for the "new" bill as well.

The records for researching bills

The following records are sources of research information on bills.

Hansard

Hansard is the official verbatim report of the debates in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It includes debates of the Committee of the Whole House.

Using *Hansard* to research bills introduced before 1944:

If the bill pre-dates 1944, check the "newspaper" *Hansard* (it may contain a report of the bill). It dates back to Confederation. *Hansard* and "newspaper" *Hansard* are available in the Archives Library.

Using *Hansard* to research bills introduced after 1944:

Bills introduced after 1944 will be found in *Hansard*. Use the date of the first reading to find the transcript of the introductory speech for the bill in *Hansard*. Similarly, if a committee of the legislature reviewed the bill (see the Committee Proceedings section, below), *Hansard* for that date will provide you with the transcript of the debate(s).

Original Bills

If you are unable to find the information you need from *Hansard*, the Archives has a series called "Original Bills." They are the actual drafts of the bills prepared for each reading. They are often annotated, sometimes extensively. The information in this series may be only a repetition of what you already saw in *Bills Ontario*. "Original Bills" holdings include public bills (government and private member's) pre-dating 1976 and private bills pre-dating 1983. To request an "Original Bill," fill a request with the reference code (Series [RG 49-39](#)), the bill number and title, whether it is a government or private bill and the year.

Sessional Papers

Sessional papers are documents tabled in the Legislature. For Government Bills, a background document on the bill and its purpose may have been tabled as an unprinted sessional paper when the bill was introduced.

To search sessional papers (both printed and unprinted), check the indexes to the *Journals*, which will give the title, year and number of a paper, and indicate if it was printed or not. To request sessional papers that were not printed, give the reference code (Series [RG 49-19](#)), the sessional paper number, the year the paper was tabled and the title.

Until 1947, printed sessional papers were bound together for each year. Printed sessional papers up to 1924 are available on microfilm in the Reading Room. To retrieve papers printed between 1925 and 1947, give the year and paper number. To access sessional papers after 1947, consult BIBLION, our online library catalogue.

If the original bill does not provide the information you need, you may find that a sessional paper may have been tabled when the bill was introduced in the legislature. This has been a requirement since 1976. Most sessional papers were printed until 1947. Pre-1924 printed sessional papers are on microfilm **B 97** (available in the Reading Room).

Committee Proceedings

Committees of the legislature, including the Committee of the Whole House, traditionally review bills. Debates of the Committee of the Whole House are included in the Hansard.

To see committee proceedings prior to October 1989, or for more extensive committee records (including submissions), search the Archives Descriptive Database (use the advanced search option "Groups of Archival Records", and enter *RG 49** in the reference code field) and select the appropriate series reference for the committee that you identified in the *Journal* (see above). To request the records you want to view, give the proper reference code, the committee name, and the bill number, title, and year.

Since October 1989, there has been a full *Hansard* service for all meetings of the Committee of the Whole House or any standing or select committee, unless otherwise ordered by the legislature. These debates are available from the Archives.

Cabinet Submissions

If the bill you are researching dates from 1971 to the present, first consult the Indices and lists of Cabinet submissions (sub-series RG 75-18-2). Be aware that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1987 governs access to Cabinet submission records.

The person who introduced the bill to the legislature at first reading will be a cabinet minister or his/her parliamentary assistant. Use Debra Forman's reference guide, *Legislators and Legislatures of Ontario* (available in the Archives Reading Room), to determine which ministry sponsored the bill. The Indices and lists of Cabinet submissions RG 75-18-2) will also indicate the originating ministry and often the specific division or branch as well. Tell member of the reference staff what you've found and where you've looked, and he/she will show you how to proceed.

To see the Cabinet submission(s) fill out a request slip, indicating the **reference code** (sub-series RG 75-18-1), the **submission number**, the **title** and the **year**.

To see the Cabinet minute(s) fill out a request slip, indicating the **reference code** (Series RG 75-14), **minute number** and **subject, bill number, meeting number** and **year**.

To see the Cabinet committee minute(s) fill out a request slip indicating the **reference code** (Series [RG 75-7](#)), **minute number** and **subject, bill number, meeting number, committee name** and **year**.

To see the Cabinet Committee on Legislation minutes, fill out a request slip, indicating the **reference code** (Series RG 27-2; not described in the Archives Descriptive Database), **minute number** and **subject, bill number, meeting number** and **year**.

The Office of the Legislative Counsel assists in the drafting of government bills. See the description for Series [RG 4-33](#) for information on Legislative Counsel drafts if your bill is after 1939.

Private Member's Bills

There are two types of private member's bills:

Private Member's Public Bills originate with a private member (i.e., not a Cabinet minister) of the legislature. For post-1970 bills, there may be records created by the Office of the Legislative Counsel. This office assists private members in drawing up bills. See the description for Series [RG 4-35](#) for more information on Legislative Counsel drafts.

Private Bills originate with an individual, group or corporation outside the Legislative Assembly, but a private member (i.e., not a Cabinet minister) must introduce the bill. For post-1975 private bills, there may be records created by the Office of the Legislative Counsel, which assists in drawing up private bills. See the description for Series [RG 4-34](#) for more information on Legislative Counsel drafts.

Private (Non-government) Records

For private bills, check the [Archives Descriptive Database](#) and consult with the Member of the reference staff to see if the Archives hold any private records of the individual, group or corporation.

Part 2: Researching Statutes

Please note that many of these sources are available most major public libraries.

How Statutes Are Organized

Annual Statutes Volumes

Statutes enacted after December 31, 1990, are published in print in **annual statutes volumes**. Statutes enacted after December 31, 1999, are also published on [e-laws](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/index.html) (<http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/index.html>), the Government of Ontario's online resources for laws, as Source Law, and they may be accessed by year of enactment. The statutes that received Royal Assent in 2006, for example, are referred to as the Statutes of Ontario, 2006, which may be abbreviated as S.O. 2006.

Chapter Numbers

Each statute has a title and a chapter number. Chapter numbers are assigned sequentially in the order in which statutes receive Royal Assent in a given year. For example, the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 is chapter 17 in the *Statutes of Ontario, 2006* and may be cited as S.O. 2006, c. 17.

Citations

There are two ways to cite (or make reference to) a statute:

- by regnal year (the year of the reign of the Queen or King); for example, An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Public Schools Act. Statutes of Ontario, 48 Vic. Chap. 49. (See Finding Aid **L 14**, Appendix 1 for a table of Years, Legislatures and Regnal years.)
- by calendar year; for example, An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Public Schools Act. Statutes of Ontario, 1885. Chap. 49.

Indexes:

An index is available at the end of each annual statute volume.

Numbering of Acts:

Each act is given a chapter number. From 1867 to 1976, the session of the legislature in which the act was passed determined the number of the act. After 1976, acts were assigned a number.

To research a statute, you need to know the year that it became law and its name.

Revised Statutes of Ontario (RSO) are available ONLY for 1914, 1927, 1937, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990. RSO 1990 was the last printed revised or consolidated set. The consolidation is now continually updated on [e-laws](#). If you are researching a statute that was enacted in 1945, you will need to consult the RSO for 1950. If you do not know the year, check with the ***Indexes to Statutes of Ontario*** for the years in which you think the statute was passed. The pre-1903 statutes are available on self-service microfilm B 91 in the Reading Room. Statutes dating from 1903 to the present are available in bound volumes in the Archives' library.

The Records for Researching Statutes

The official statutes are published, with revisions, approximately every 10 years, as the *Revised Statutes of Ontario*. Subsequent statutes are cumulated and published in annual volumes entitled, *Statutes of Ontario*. The **Table of Statutes** in volume one of the *Revised Statutes of Ontario (RSO)* and at the front of each annual *Statutes of Ontario (S.O)* lists statutes alphabetically by title, providing the corresponding chapter numbers.

The following statutes are on microfilm:

- Statutes of Upper Canada, 1792–1840
- Statutes of the Province of Canada, 1841–1846
- Statutes of Ontario, 1867–1902
- Revised Statutes of Upper Canada, Canada (Prov.) and Ontario, 1831–1897

For Upper Canada Statutes, the microfilm pagination:

- is continuous from 1792 to 1804
- is non-continuous from 1805 to 1817
- begins at 399 and ends at 485 from 1818 to 1819.

The following statutes are NOT on microfilm and there is no finding aid for them. To consult these records, please speak with a member of the reference staff and use the reference code “Govt Doc.”

- Statutes of Ontario, 1903–1999
- Statutes of Ontario, 2000 to present (please note that the bound statutes for a calendar year are published, and received by the Archives of Ontario during the next calendar year)

Please note that when requesting the sessional/annual Statutes of Ontario, do not use the term “revised statutes.”

Other Resources for Researching Bills and Statutes

Period-inTime (PIT) Law

PIT is a database of current and historical versions of consolidated statutes and regulations that is searchable by date. It makes it possible for to find different consolidated versions of a law at different periods in time. There is a historical version of a consolidated statute or regulation available on [e-laws](#) for the statutes or regulations amended after January 1, 2004. (See also Research Guide 219, *Researching Regulations*.)

Office Consolidations

Consolidations of each act are unofficial reprints that incorporate amendments, and sometimes regulations, for the convenience of legal research. They are filed alphabetically by the title of the act. These consolidations are published irregularly, so it is wise to consult the *Ontario Statute Citator* for the most recent changes to an act.

Source Law

Source law is law as made by the person or body with the authority to make it. In the case of acts, the source law is the act as enacted by the legislature. In the case of regulations (see research guide 219 *Researching Regulations*), the source law is the regulation as filed with the Registrar of Regulations. A source law may be:

- a new act or regulation (called the parent),

- an amending act or regulation (it amends the parent), or
- a repealing or revoking act or regulation (it repeals the parent act or revokes the parent regulation).

Source law is available on [e-laws](#), for statutes or regulations amended or affected after January 1, 2004.

Websites

Ontario Legislative Assembly

The official site of the Ontario Legislative Assembly reports on the status of legislation and provides the text of current session bills, legislative debates and other legislative materials (<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>)

ACJNet – Access to Justice Network

This site links to Canadian federal and provincial legislation, including the text of the Ontario statutes and regulations (<http://www.acjnet.org/>).

MAKING CONTACT

Ready and Willing

Although unable to do your bills and statutes research for you, our reference staff are waiting to assist you. You may telephone or write to them by mail or email or — best of all — visit the Archives of Ontario.

Contact us

Telephone: 416-327-1600 Toll free (Ontario): 1-800-668-9933

Fax: 416-327-1999

Email: reference@ontario.ca

Address: Archives of Ontario, 134 Ian Macdonald Blvd., Toronto, ON M7A 2C5

Website

For information about the Archives' holdings, as well as access to research guides and other customer service materials available through the Archives of Ontario, please visit our website www.ontario.ca/archives.

Customer Service and Research Guides

The Archives of Ontario has published a series of in-depth research guides on a variety of specific topics. For more information, please see “Research Guides and Tools” under “Start Your Research” on the home page of the Archives website.

This document may contain references to electronic links that can be activated only by using the HTML version found on the Archives of Ontario website.

This information is provided as a public service. Although we endeavour to ensure that the information is as current and accurate as possible, errors do occasionally occur. Therefore, we cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information. Readers should where possible verify the information before acting on it.