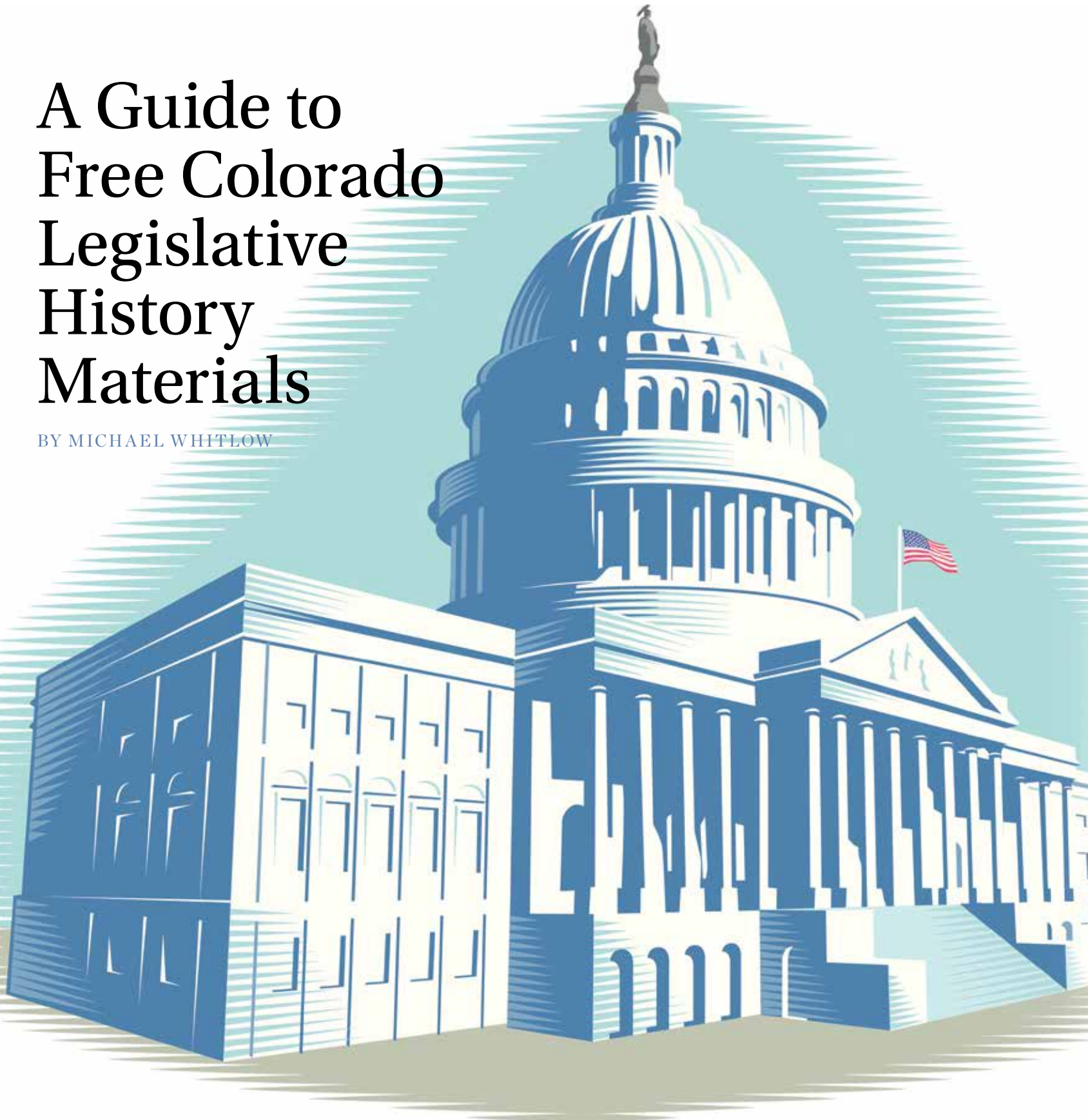


A Guide to Free Colorado Legislative History Materials

BY MICHAEL WHITLOW



The Colorado government is a leader in transparency and availability of legislative information, but it's easy to be overwhelmed by the amount of information available. This article serves as a guide for researching legislative history using the Colorado General Assembly website and a few other free public resources. With this guide, hopefully you'll find it easier to locate the precise materials you need to track the substance and reasoning behind changes to the Colorado Revised Statutes.

Locating Statutory History

To begin, you'll need to locate the statutory section you're researching. Whether you're using the books or an online search engine, you'll want to look at the end of the statutory text for the historical notes. Whether this is labeled "history," "credits," "currentness," "statutory notes," or something similar, you should see a chronological list of the public acts that created and subsequently amended the section.

Throughout this article, we'll be using CRS § 18-9-202, Colorado's cruelty to animals statute, to illustrate each step. To locate this section online, you can access LexisNexis's free version of the Colorado Revised Statutes via the General Assembly's website: <https://leg.colorado.gov/agencies/office-legislative-legal-services/colorado-revised-statutes>. Once you pull up the statute, scroll down to locate the History section:

History

Source: L. 71:FARE, p. 472, § 1. C.R.S. 1963:§ 40-9-202. L. 73:P. 381, § 5. L. 77:(1) amended, p. 969, § 58, effective July 1. L. 90:(1) amended, p. 1632, § 5, effective July 1. L. 92:(1) amended, p. 412, § 1, effective April 29. L. 97:(2)(a.5) added, p. 1569, § 2, effective July 1. L. 2000:(2) amended, p. 1509, § 1, effective September 1; (2)(a.5)(I) amended, p. 1375, § 2, effective September 1. L. 2002:(1.5) and (2)(c) added and (2)(a), (2)(a.5)(I)(A), (2)(a.5)(II), and (2)(b) amended, pp. 1589, 1588, 1587, §§ 26, 25, 22, effective July 1; (2)(b) amended, p. 1517, § 204, effective October 1. L. 2003:(2)(b)(II) amended, p. 974, § 9, effective April 17; (1)(a) amended and (1.6) and (1.8) added, p. 2093, § 2, effective July 1; (1)(a), (1.5), (2)(a.5)(I)(A), (2)(a.5)(II), (2)(b)(II), and (2)(b)(III) amended, p. 1434, § 30, effective July 1. L. 2004:(2.5) added, p. 509, § 2, effective April 21. L. 2007:(1)(a) and (1.8) amended, p. 725, § 5, effective July 1. L. 2011:(1.5)(c) and (2)(d) added, (HB 11-1151), ch. 81, p. 219, §§ 2, 3, effective August 10. L. 2012:(3) amended, (HB 12-1317), ch. 248, p. 1203, § 5, effective June 4. L. 2016:(1.5)(c), (2)(a), (2)(a.5)(V), and (2)(d) amended and (1.6) repealed, (HB 16-1348), ch. 236, p. 953, § 2, effective June 6. L. 2018:(1.5)(c), (2)(a), (2)(a.5)(V), and (2)(d)(II) amended, (HB 18-1041), ch. 19, p. 267, § 2, effective March 7; (2)(a.5)(VII) amended, (HB 18-1024), ch. 26, p. 322, § 12, effective October 1. L. 2019:(1.5)(c), (2)(a), (2)(a.5)(V), and (2)(d)(II) amended, (HB 19-1180), ch. 75, p. 276, § 2, effective April 4; (2)(a.5)(II), (2)(a.5)(III), and (2)(a.5)(IV) amended and (2)(a.5)(V.5) and (4) added, (HB 19-1092), ch. 137, p. 1736, § 1, effective August 2. L. 2023:(2)(a.5)(V) and (2)(d)(II) amended, (HB 23-1286), ch. 341, p. 2048, § 1, effective June 2; (2)(c) amended, (HB 23-1293), ch. 298, p. 1790, § 37, effective October 1. L. 2024:(1.5), (1.8), (2)(a), (2)(a.5)(V)(B), (2)(c), (2)(d)(II), and (2.5) amended, (HB 24-1074), ch. 69, p. 226, § 2, effective April 17.

The History section for CRS § 18-9-202 provides an overview of the statute's legislative history. Later in the article, we'll use the Colorado General Assembly website to learn more about two of the amendments, HB 11-1151 and HB 24-1074.

The History section makes it easy to see statutory amendments since the bill's original passage. As you can see, this statute has been amended multiple times in the last few years. If you know the year the changes you're interested in were made, you can quickly locate the relevant acts. Otherwise, you'll want to go in chronological order and see how the statute has evolved over time. The most important thing to note at this point is the public law or bill number associated with each act, because you will need one of these to access legislative history. The year the law was passed will determine how you conduct your research.

If you're researching a law from 2016 and later and have either the public law number or bill number, you can find the law's legislative history on the General Assembly's website. You'll notice in the example above that beginning in 2011, Lexis included the bill number along with the public law number.

For laws passed between 1998 and 2015, you'll need to use the original bill number to access the General Assembly's digital archive.¹ If you only have the public law number, you can find the bill number using Scholarly Commons for the University of Colorado–Boulder.² Rebecca Ciota has written a separate guide to for using the Scholarly Commons to locate session laws.³

Public Law Numbering

Remember that public laws have their own number separate from the bill number of the introduced legislation. Colorado public laws are published like a serial journal with a volume corresponding to the calendar year and consecutive pagination, and each enacted law has a chapter number that corresponds to its chronological order of passage. So the first public law of a particular legislative session would be [Year], chapter 1, page 1. The second act would be chapter 2, and its page number would correspond to the next page after chapter 1 completes.

The screenshot below shows how the first five public laws of 2024 appear on the Colorado General Assembly website.

Session Laws from the 2024 Regular Session

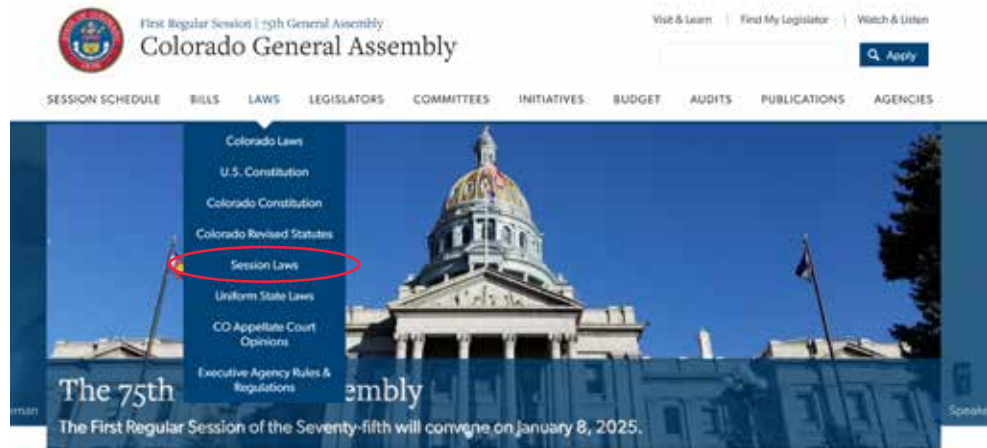
BILL #	BILL TOPIC	EFFECTIVE DATE	PAGE #	CHAPTER #	CHAPTER TEXT
HB24-1084	Repeal & Reenact Earned Income Tax Credit Increase	07/30/2024	1	1	PDF
HB24-1179	2023 Property Tax Year Updated Abstract	02/15/2024	4	2	PDF
HB24-1020	Enactment of CRS 2023	02/20/2024	6	3	PDF
HB24-1090	Privacy Protections Criminal Justice Records	02/20/2024	8	4	PDF
HB24-1146	Medicaid Provider Suspension for Organized Fraud	02/20/2024	10	5	PDF

Colorado public laws can be accessed at leg.colorado.gov/session-laws. Sort by Page Ascending to view the laws by their chapter number.

Next, we'll explore how to access the full legislative history materials depending on when the law was passed.

Legislative History for Laws From 2016 to the Present

As noted above, for laws passed between 2016 and the present, you can use the public law number or the bill number to access the legislative history on the General Assembly's website. To begin, navigate to the main page at <https://leg.colorado.gov>, highlight the Laws tab, and then select Session Laws from the drop-down menu.



Next, you'll need to ensure that you're looking at the right year. On the right-hand side of the screen, you'll have a drop-down menu to select the appropriate legislative session:



This will show you a chronological list of the laws enacted in that session. As explained above, the public law number is broken down in the “page” and “chapter” columns. If you have only the public law number, sort by page number and scroll until you find the corresponding page and chapter for the statute you’re researching. Or, if you have the bill number, sort by bill number and look for your bill on the left.

So, to easily locate HB 24-1074 from our earlier example, just select the 2024 Regular Session, sort by Bill # Ascending, and scroll down to find the bill:

Session Laws

Immediately after the adjournment of each session, the Office of Legislative Legal Services indexes and publishes all the bills and concurrent resolutions passed at that session together with those resolutions and memorials designated for printing by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

View by Session
 2024 Regular Session
 Sort by
 Bill # Ascending

Session Laws from the 2024 Regular Session

BILL #	BILL TOPIC	EFFECTIVE DATE	PAGE #	CHAPTER #	CHAPTER TEXT
HB24-1056	Issuance of Treasurer’s Deeds	07/01/2024	782	165	PDF
HB24-1058	Protect Privacy of Biological Data	08/07/2024	222	68	PDF
HB24-1059	Compensation for State Elected Officials	08/07/2024	2551	377	PDF
HB24-1060	Travel Insurance Consumer Protections	08/07/2024	427	128	PDF
HB24-1062	Warrants for Metro Sewage Disposal Districts	08/07/2024	234	71	PDF
HB24-1063	Addressing Abbreviated School Days	06/05/2024	3047	436	PDF
HB24-1067	Ballot Access for Candidates with Disabilities	08/07/2024	178	51	PDF
HB24-1071	Name Change to Conform with Gender Identity	04/19/2024	348	111	PDF
HB24-1072	Protection of Victims of Sexual Offenses	07/01/2024	407	123	PDF
HB24-1074	Aggravated Cruelty to Law Enforcement Animals	04/17/2024	226	69	PDF
HB24-1076	Purple Star School Program	05/18/2024	1239	203	PDF

Click on the title of the bill, Aggravated Cruelty to Law Enforcement Animals, to bring up a page specifically dedicated to HB24-1074. Click on the PDF link to download a PDF of the act.

To access the full legislative history, click the bill title and go directly to the page dedicated to that bill. Here, you’ll find:

- every version of the bill from its introduction through various amendments to final passage;
- any fiscal notes attached to the bill en route to passage;
- which committee assignments the bill received, as well as committee reports and hearing summaries;
- vote tallies for the bill including how individual legislators voted; and
- copies of any amendments to the bill from its introduction to final passage.

Bill Text | Fiscal | Committees | Votes | Amendments | Bill History | Sponsors | Session Laws

Bill Text

All Versions (7)

DATE	BILL TYPE	DOCUMENTS
04/17/2024	Signed Act	PDF
04/09/2024	Final Act	PDF
03/22/2024	Rerevised	PDF
03/21/2024	Revised	PDF

Under the committees tab, specifically, you'll need to be mindful of where to locate the information you're seeking. First, you'll need to select which Senate or House committee you're interested in; then you'll see options to view the vote summary, the committee report, or the hearing summary.



The hearing summary will contain the minutes of the meeting with time stamps.

The information found on the Hearing Summary page can be used to locate the corresponding audio recording on the Colorado General Assembly website. Later in this article, we'll locate the audio recording for the January 30 session shown here.



The committee's name, bill number, hearing date, and time stamps will all be useful in locating the audio files for any recordings. Instructions for locating audio recordings are included later in this article.

Legislative History for Sessions Between 1998 and 2015

For bills passed between 1998 and 2015, once you have the bill number (using the Scholarly Commons, if necessary), go to the General Assembly's homepage and use the Bills tab to locate the Prior Sessions archive.



From here, select 2015 and Prior Legislative Sessions, and then access the House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials for your bill's corresponding year.

For example, to research HB 11-1151, open the archive for the 2011 Regular Session's House & Senate Bills:

2015 and Prior Legislative Session Information

The General Assembly's legacy site contains 2015 and earlier legislative session information.

SESSION YEAR	BILLS, RESOLUTIONS, AND MEMORIALS	COMMITTEE SUMMARY	DIRECTORY	STATUS SHEET	JOURNALS
2015 REGULAR SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals
2014 REGULAR SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals
2013 REGULAR SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals
2012 FIRST SPECIAL SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals
2012 REGULAR SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals
2011 REGULAR SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals
2010 REGULAR SESSION	House & Senate Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials	Committee Summary	House & Senate Directory	House & Senate Status Sheet	House & Senate Journals

Then use the drop-down menu for Select Bill Range to select House Bills 1151-1200.

The screenshot shows the Colorado General Assembly website with a search filter for 'House Bills 1151-1200'. A dropdown menu titled 'Select Bill Range' is open, listing various bill ranges. The range 'House Bills 1151-1200' is highlighted in blue. The background shows a table of bills with columns for Bill #, Title and Sponsors, All Bill Versions, History, Committee Votes, and 3rd Reading Votes.

As you can see, this page has most of the same information regarding bill versions, fiscal notes, votes, and committee reports that's available for 2016 and later sessions:

The screenshot shows the Colorado General Assembly website with search results for 'House Bills 1151-1200'. The search results table is visible, showing details for HB 11-1151, including bill versions, fiscal notes, and committee reports. A red arrow points to the search results for HB 11-1151.

A search for HB 11-1151 using the Prior Sessions Archive provides similar information to what was available for the more recent HB 24-1074.

Audio Recordings

The General Assembly has recorded its floor debates and public hearings since 1973. Most of these are in the State Archives and can still be accessed with the appropriate date information; however, prior to 1973, committee reports, debate transcripts, and other materials were not routinely preserved. Colorado Legislative Council publications from 1954 to present, however, are digitized and available via the University of Denver’s Digital Commons.⁴

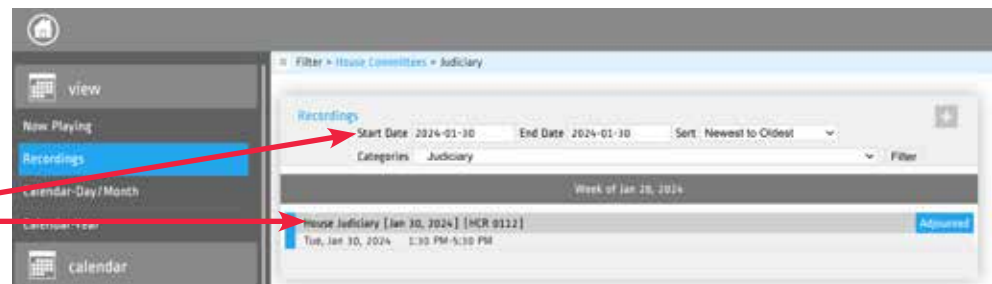
If the particular proceeding you want to listen to is from 2012 or later, it can be accessed from the General Assembly’s website using the Watch & Listen option in the upper-right corner.



The landing page will allow you to choose which chamber’s recordings you want to access. Once you’ve selected House or Senate recordings, you’ll be taken to a page with a calendar that defaults to the current date. Use the drop-down menus on the calendar to access the date for the floor debate or committee hearing you’re seeking. A list of that day’s recordings will populate with the name of the appropriate committee or floor action.

Below are search results for the January 30, 2024, House Judiciary Committee meeting from HB 24-1074:

Filtering the House recordings by date and committee easily brings up the audio recording sought. If you’re using the minutes or hearing summaries of a meeting, you can use the player to advance the recording to the portion you need.



Closing Thoughts

The past three decades have seen a significant expansion in access to legislative history materials within the state of Colorado. By following the steps above, you should be able to effectively research the history of Colorado statutes using entirely free public resources. CL



Michael Whitlow is the head of instructional services at the William A. Wise Law Library at the University of Colorado–Boulder. He has worked as a law librarian within the state of Colorado since 2018—michael.whitlow@colorado.edu.

Coordinating Editor: Michelle Penn, michelle.penn@colorado.edu

NOTES

1. For laws passed prior to 1998, you’ll need to use print session laws and House and Senate Journals. Copies of these are kept by the University of Colorado–Boulder’s William A. Wise Law Library, <https://www.colorado.edu/law-library>, and the General Assembly’s Joint Legislative Library, <https://leg.colorado.gov/agencies/legislative-council-staff/joint-legislative-library>.
2. <https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/colorado-session-laws>. If the bill was passed in 2003 or later, you can also locate the bill number using the General Assembly’s Red Book archive, <https://leg.colorado.gov/agencies/office-legislative-legal-services/red-book-archive>.
3. <https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/session-laws-2001-2050/9353>.
4. https://digitalcommons.du.edu/colc_all.