INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCHING ALASKA LEGISLATIVE HISTORY MATERIALS

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INTRODUCTION

For many legal researchers, legislative history is a dark cloud on the horizon, a distant threat that can be avoided if the wind blows just right. Eventually, however, the storm will hit. A case will turn on the meaning of a statute, its intent and purpose, the parsing of a particular phrase. When faced with a potentially ambiguous statute, you may have little option. You need to know how to research legislative history.

Some legal minds doubt the value of legislative history in illuminating the true meaning of legislation. Regardless of your personal view on the matter, you should be prepared to use legislative history as one of many tools in your arsenal, one that can bolster your argument or minimize the impact of an adverse law. Justice Antonin Scalia, who considers arguments based on legislative history "legal fiction," nonetheless dedicated three pages to the subject in his book on legal persuasion.[1] Certainly, both the Alaska Supreme Court and the Alaska Court of Appeals consider legislative history a viable source and regularly include it in their analyses.[2] Because Alaska is such a young

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1. ANTONIN SCALIA & BRYAN A. GARNER, MAKING YOUR CASE: THE ART OF PERSUADING JUDGES 48 (2008).

2. *See, e.g.*, State v. Alaska Riverways, Inc., 232 P.3d 1203, 1216–17 (Alaska 2010) (relying on committee summary of major provisions of amendment); Wilson v. State, 207 P.3d 565, 569 (Alaska Ct. App. 2009) (equating explanatory language on voter materials to legislative histories when interpreting the intent of a voter-passed constitutional amendment); State v. Batts, 195 P.3d 144, 151 (Alaska Ct. App. 2008) ("Alaska courts apply a flexible approach which allows a court to look to the legislative history of a statute 'even if its language is plain on its face.'" (quoting Curran v. Progressive Nw. Ins. Co., 29 P.3d 829, 831 (Alaska 2001))).

state, there is often a dearth of case law on a particular issue, so legislative history becomes even more important.

If you practice in Alaska, you need to know how to use legislative history and put it to work in the service of your case. And to do that, you need to first understand what it is, how it works, and how to find it. This Practicum explores the basic process of legislative history research, starting with an overview of the required steps and following with more detailed instructions on finding particular pieces of the puzzle. These detailed instructions are organized by the year of the bill; if you're currently researching a bill, you can jump right to the relevant portion of the Practicum for instructions, though the discussion may refer back to a procedure discussed above.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY IN A NUTSHELL: WHAT AM I DOING, AND WHY AM I DOING IT?

The most common starting place for a legislative history is a statute. No matter how clear-cut statutory language may appear on its face, you can usually find two lawyers who will argue two (or more) different interpretations. Enter legislative history. Most versions of the Alaska Statutes include each statute's history in some format at the end of the statute itself. The official print version, for example, lists the history in a parenthetical, while Westlaw places it under the heading "Credit(s)."

The first task is to determine which legislative action to research. For some statutes, only one session law will appear in the history. These statutes were enacted and have not been amended. Here, no decision is necessary—the enacting legislation is the only action by the legislature. Other statutes, however, may have been amended one or more times. Each of these amendments represents a separate legislative effort, an individual bill that passed through the legislature, the history of which may be researched and compiled.

If more than one session law appears in your statute's history, you first need to decide which session law is relevant to your issue. If you're interested in the general intent of the statute, you might want the original enacting legislation. In that case, your questions are: Why did the legislature enact this statute in the first place? Why did they feel this law was necessary or important? What were they trying to achieve? On the other hand, if you are looking for the meaning of a particular word or phrase, you want the bill that introduced that specific language. This might be the original bill, or it might be a later amendment. If you want to know what the legislature meant by the phrase "excessive force," then

you don't need to spend time examining an earlier version of the statute that did not include that phrase.

In order to determine which legislative action to pursue, look up the session laws. A session law contains the text of the bill as passed and is designated by year and chapter number. A brief civics lesson: After a bill passes both chambers of the legislature, it is sent to the governor. When the governor signs the bill into law, it becomes a session law. Each successive bill signed into law by the governor becomes the next chapter in that year's session laws. So "ch. 50 SLA 1983" refers to the fiftieth bill signed into law by the governor in 1983.

If your statute has been amended several times, check each session law in its history to see whether that particular change is relevant to your issue. Starting in 1979, session laws are published in legislative style to facilitate this step. This means that old, deleted language is printed in capital letters in brackets, and new, added language is printed in bold, underlined text. With a session law printed in legislative style, you can tell at a glance whether the amendment matters to you and whether you need to trace the history of the bill.

When you find a session law you wish to research, next find the bill number (remember, before it was a session law it was a bill). The bill number is sometimes called the source and often hides in a string of coded numbers and letters. Within this code lies the basic bill number—a designation for House or Senate Bill and a number (this is the HB or SB immediately adjacent to the numerals, plus the numbers themselves). The rest of the source code may indicate whether any committees substituted their own versions of the bill along the way, which committee's substitute was finally adopted, and whether the bill was amended on the House or Senate floor. None of this information is necessary to compile legislative history; you simply need House Bill 44 (HB 44) or Senate Bill 253 (SB 253). If you're interested in what the rest of the source code means, a key to abbreviations used in bill names appears at the beginning of the Bill History volumes.

For the duration of your research, you'll be working with the bill. Unfortunately, regardless of the bill's length, you'll be working with the bill as a whole. You may only be interested in subsection (a)(2) of your particular statute, while the bill is dozens of pages long and affects an entire chapter of the statutes. It can be frustrating to wade through voluminous material unrelated to your specific issue, but that's the nature of the beast. There is no way to focus solely on one part of the bill. As Chief Justice Walter L. Carpeneti noted in his 2010 State of the Judiciary Address to the Alaska Legislature, the researcher may spend hours "sifting through haystacks of legislative history searching for the

needle of legislative intent."[3] A large bill makes for a great haystack, a narrow issue a small needle.

Once you have your bill number, there are three general sources to check in the research process—the House and Senate journals, the committee minutes, and the committee bill files. The journals are daily diaries of everything that happens on the House and Senate floor. They are generally bare-boned and procedural, as most of the substantive work occurs in the committees. The committee minutes are the records of committee meetings, hearings, and debates. The committee bill files include everything created or compiled by the committee while considering the bill.

Access the journals through the bill indexes. Depending on the year, the bill indexes appear either at the end of the journal or in a separately bound volume. For each bill, the index lists every journal page on which the bill is discussed. While newer indexes are highly accurate, the older indexes include some errors—if you don't find your bill on the listed page, try turning a few pages forward or backward.

The journals are mostly procedural; there is little to be gleaned here about the legislature's intent in adopting a particular law. Nevertheless, checking the journals is an important step. For one thing, due diligence requires it. Many ventures in legislative history are unproductive. Often, despite an exhaustive search, you won't find anything that speaks to the meaning of a particular section or phrase. Nonetheless, the exhaustive search is necessary. You cannot tell a judge that the legislative history is silent upon a particular point if you haven't looked under every possible stone.

A thorough check of the journals involves looking at every page referred to in the journal index entry for your bill. As you move through the journal pages, look for anything substantive, such as a letter of intent, a governor's transmittal letter, a sectional analysis, or a fiscal note. At the same time, make a list of all the committees that considered your bill. Be sure to note whether the committee was in the House or the Senate, as the committee referrals in each chamber may or may not be symmetrical.

After the journals, turn to the committee materials. Most legislative work is done in committee, so most substantive material is found in the committee minutes and bill files. The committee minutes are the summarized transcripts of everything spoken out loud during meetings, hearings, and debates. If you want to hear more, audio recordings may

3. Chief Justice Walter L. Carpeneti, *State of the Judiciary Address* (Feb. 10, 2010), http://gavelalaska.org/media/?media_id=JFLS100210A.

also be available for committee meetings. Committee bill files are the committee's working files on each bill, including any material committee members accumulated while the bill was under their consideration. Content of the files varies from bill to bill, but they may contain anything from proposed language to correspondence to sectional analyses. Committee documents, both minutes and files, are available either online or on microfiche.

That's the basic process: journals, minutes, bill files. Other resources might aid your search—you can look at the different versions of the bill if there are one or more committee substitutes; you can listen to audio recordings of committee meetings; you can search contemporary newspapers for articles about the subject of the legislation. But the bulk of the work consists of these three steps. If you've looked in these three places, you've completed your research of the legislative history.

PRINT V. ELECTRONIC V. MICROFORM: WHERE DO I FIND THIS STUFF?

Some of the materials you'll use while compiling your legislative history are only available in print, some are online, and some are on microfilm or microfiche. Some materials are available in more than one format. Which format you use depends on the year of the legislation and your location.

Before 1965

If you're researching a bill from the territorial legislature or the earliest days of statehood, you will be working with print resources only. Statutes from the beginning of the twentieth century are available in some state libraries, and the Anchorage Law Library also has nineteenth-century Oregon statutes, from which the earliest territorial Alaska laws were adopted. Use these books to determine which session law, and hence which bill, you need to research.

No committee minutes or bill files survive from before 1965, so the only source of legislative history is the journals. While this means that you're far less likely to find much of substance, it also means your search will be quick. In addition, while the journals are merely procedural, early journals sometimes include more substantive material than generally appears in them now. Therefore, there is a chance you will find some substantive discussion of your bill in the journals.

For the pre-1965 period, the bill indexes are located in the back of the journals. If your bill is a house bill, check the back of the last volume

of the House Journal; if it's a senate bill, check the last volume of the Senate Journal. Depending on the year, you'll either find journal pages for both the House and Senate Journals listed in the index, or you might have to check an additional index in the other journal. That is, some years, the Senate Journal will include all pages in both the Senate and House Journals for all Senate bills, and the House Journal will include all pages in both the House and Senate Journals for all House bills. Other years, the Senate Journal will list only Senate Journal pages for both Senate and House bills, and the House Journal will list only House Journal pages for both House and Senate bills. This sounds confusing, but it's self-evident when you're actually looking at the indexes. Just know that you might have to consult indexes in two different volumes.

When you're researching bills from this period, be prepared for typos in the journal indexes. If the index lists a page incorrectly, try flipping backward and forward a few pages to see if you can find the correct page.

Once you've looked at all listed journal pages for your bill, you are most likely done. There are no committee materials available for bills before 1965, so you probably will not find any additional legislative history. That said, you could check the Legislative Library Catalog on Folio to see if there is any additional information on your subject.[4]

1965–1975

If you're researching a bill from this period, you will start with the print journals, following the same process as you would for pre-1965 bills. The bill indexes are in the back of the journals, and the journals themselves are only available in print. But starting in 1965, you can find some committee materials on microfiche.

Microfiche collections of Alaska committee minutes and bill files are available in various locations in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. Multi-binder indexes provide access to the collection. Check the microfiche indexes in the library to see if anything exists for your bill. For bill files, you may find a listing of subjects rather than specific bills. You also might find seemingly unhelpful listings like "miscellaneous bills." Depending on how much time you are willing to spend, you can check listings like those to see if they're relevant.

4. *See infra* p. 291.

1976–1981

Starting in 1976, the bill history indexes, which tell you which journal pages mention your bill, are published as separate volumes rather than in the back of the journals. Bill history indexes are either for house bills or senate bills, and are published separately for each year or session. To start your research, choose the House or Senate Bill History volume for the correct year and look up your bill. The index will list every relevant journal page, along with a date and a summary of any action taken. The Bill History volumes list journal pages for both the House and Senate Journals; you do not need to consult separate indexes for the House and Senate Journals.

By this period, much more committee material is available. Once you have looked through all relevant journal pages and have your list of committees, check the microfiche indexes for committee minutes and bill files.

1982–1992

1982 marks the first big change in accessing Alaska legislative history material. For the first time, committee minutes are available online. On the Alaska State Legislature's website, the Folio Infobases, commonly referred to as "Folio" or simply "Infobases," provide electronic access to various legislative materials, including the text of bills before the legislature, session laws, House and Senate Journals, and committee minutes. Coverage varies: the session laws begin in 1981, while the journals begin in 1987. For everything except committee minutes, the online version represents an additional access point, not the sole access point; while the electronic version supplements the print version, it does not replace it.

Starting in 1982, however, the only widely available source of committee minutes is this electronic version. Minutes are no longer available on microfiche, so Infobases is your only real option. That said, Folio is not an absolutely complete source of minutes. There are some gaps. To be sure you have all the committee minutes for your bill, you may want to consult the Committee Minutes Index, if you have access to it, or contact the Law Library or the Legislative Reference Library for assistance.

This software was developed in the 1980s, and it's pretty clunky. But, if you know how to navigate the system, you can easily find what you're looking for. To find the minutes, start at the Infobases homepage, http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folio.asp, scroll down to Committee Minute Text, and choose the database that corresponds to the year of

your bill. Once in the database, you'll see a Table of Contents for that database. For the committee minutes databases, the headings in the Table of Contents might include Standing and Special Committees, or might be listed by House and Senate, depending on the year. Regardless of the options in the Table of Contents, do not do anything on this first page. Instead, use the blue menu buttons in the column marked Folio Controls and click on the one marked Query.

On this search page, enter your bill number in the search box in quotations marks: "sb 243" or "hb 54." It doesn't matter if you capitalize the House Bill or Senate Bill designation, but you must include the space before the bill number. DO NOT click directly on Search. Instead, check the box marked Headings w/Hits. This is a key step! Once you've checked the box, click Search or hit Enter on your keyboard.

The next page will show the number of hits in the database, but don't click directly on the green rectangle with those numbers. If you do, you'll land right in the middle of your results, with no indication of where you are or how you got there. Instead, click on the blue oval on the right with the picture that looks like an outline. This will take you back to the Table of Contents, listing only those headings in which there are hits for your bill. The numbers that now show to the left of each heading indicate how many hits are embedded in each heading. This provides a road map, so you can see which committees considered your bill, and you can identify the dates and time of each meeting for which there are minutes.

To navigate the Table of Contents, click on the plus signs to expand the content. So long as there is a plus sign, there is more content to see; when the plus signs stop, you've reached the last layer of content. Here you can click directly on the link to view the minutes. When you're looking at a document, use the Folio Controls menu button marked Contents to return to the Table of Contents.

As mentioned above, the journals are available on Folio starting in 1987. If you really want to use this database to access the journals, use the same procedure that you would for the committee minutes: go to Query, enter your bill number, check the box for Headings w/Hits, hit Search, and click the blue oval on the right with the picture of the Table of Contents. I don't particularly recommend this method, however; a query search for a particular bill number does not retrieve the same journal pages as those listed in the Bill History volumes. Searching the Folio journal databases for your bill number might result in some helpful material, but you'll likely miss some relevant pages and wade through a number of irrelevant ones. If at all possible, stick to the print journals for this time period.

Finally, while Folio offers electronic access to several sources of legislative history, the committee bill files are not among them. Bill files are still available only on microfiche throughout this period.

1993–2008

1993 marks the next big revolution in access to Alaska legislative history material—the launch of the Alaska State Legislature's second online database, BASIS. If you are researching a bill from 1993 or later, you are in for a happy surprise. With coverage of journal content, committee minutes, alternate versions of bills, and more—virtually everything you need except the committee bill files—BASIS is one-stop legislative history shopping.

To research your bill on BASIS, http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp, first choose the correct legislature. The page defaults to the current legislature, so if you're researching an older bill, scroll down to the Archive on the bottom right of the screen and choose the correct year. If for any reason you forget this first step, you'll pull up the bill from the current legislature that shares its number with yours. You will likely recognize this mistake quickly, as the bill will address a different subject entirely.

Once you are in the correct legislature, enter your bill number in the search box on the top right of the screen. You do not need quotation marks, and it doesn't matter whether you capitalize the House or Senate designation or whether you leave a space before the bill number. The search for your bill number will retrieve the Bill History/Action for your bill.

That forward slash is telling; you're getting more here than you've gotten in any one place before. The first thing you'll find on this page is the Bill History, the index which lists every journal page on which your bill is mentioned. Unlike in the print Bill History, however, this page includes live links, through which BASIS provides easy and complete access to the House and Senate Journals. Click on the red page numbers to view the journal text, and use your browser's Back button to return to the list. The one failing in this feature is that the links do not change color after you've viewed them, so it's up to you to remember where you are.

The action in the page's title refers to committee action, which is also available on BASIS. Just above the list of journal pages is a long, grey button marked Display Committee Action with Bill History. This is a toggle button, which allows you to switch back and forth between two settings. The default setting is Bill History only, but you can click this button to add Committee Action to the display. (Note that after you do

this, the button will read Display Bill History, which allows you to switch back to the original setting.)

Once you've clicked the toggle button and added Committee Action to the display, scroll down to look at the list of journal pages. You'll see that in addition to the journal pages, there are links that read "Text." These are the links to committee materials, including notices of meetings, meeting agendas, and, most importantly, committee minutes. The full text of all committee minutes for your bill is available here, in chronological order. Starting with 2005, there are also links to audio recordings of the committee meetings themselves.

But wait, there's more. Above the long, grey toggle button, you may find one or more additional buttons, which lead to other sources of information. The Minutes button takes you to links for all committee minutes for your bill. These are the same minutes listed as committee action with the Bill History, here gathered together in one place. Whether you access them all at once here or chronologically as you go through the journal pages is entirely up to you. If there is an Amendments button, it will produce a list of any journal pages on which an amendment was introduced on the House or Senate floor. And if there is a Fiscal Notes button, you'll get links to any fiscal notes prepared for your bill. Fiscal notes analyze how much a bill would cost state agencies if it were to pass.

The Full Text button produces a list of every version of the bill as it passed through the legislature. This can be a very helpful starting place if you're looking for material on a particular word or phrase. By checking the original version of the bill and any committee substitutes, you can determine whether your language was in the bill as introduced, or if it appeared in a particular committee substitute; if the latter, you might want to proceed directly to that committee's minutes.

BASIS represents a wonderful leap forward for the researcher, as you can find nearly everything you need in one place. The one class of material not included on BASIS, however, is committee bill files. If you're researching a bill from 1993 to 2008, you will still need to access the committee bill files on microfiche.

2009–Present

If you're researching a bill from 2009 or later, follow the process outlined above for any bills after 1993. Starting with 2009, however, some of the material included in the committee bill files is available on BASIS, behind the Documents button. The documents in this database do not include everything in the files, however, so to be thorough, you should probably check the bill files as well. Starting with the 26th

Legislature, 2009–2010, the committee bill files will be produced on CD rather than microfiche, and the Documents links should ultimately be a more complete version of the committee bill files. These files should go online around the time the CDs are completed, sometime in the spring or summer of 2012. The legislature is continually trying to improve electronic access to legislative materials, so hopefully the material posted on BASIS will continue to grow. Stay tuned.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

As discussed above, the basic process for researching legislative history is to check the House and Senate Journals, the committee minutes, and the committee bill files. While these materials constitute the bulk of legislative material, they are not the only sources of information.

Bills

Some researchers may wish to view the text of the bills themselves. This can be helpful for a few reasons. First, amendments introduced on the House or Senate floor can be cryptic in themselves—for example, in line 6 change "50" to "75." If you have a copy of the bill in front of you, complete with line numbers, an amendment like this will make much more sense. Second, bills can change dramatically as they move from committee to committee. If you are trying to discern the meaning of a specific word or phrase, it can be helpful to know when that language was introduced. If it appeared for the first time in a particular committee's bill substitute, you might want to focus on that committee's minutes and bill file. Sometimes when a bill changes dramatically it can be a sign that another bill merged into the original bill, especially if it suddenly becomes significantly longer. When this happens, you may find more material by tracking down and researching the merged bill as well. If it's not obvious where this new language came from, contact the Law Library or the Legislative Reference Library for help.

Bill collections include every version of every bill introduced, whether or not it became law. Bills are available on microfilm in some locations as far back as 1913, though there is a break between 1941 and 1953 (bills from those years are not available in any state library or archive; it may be possible to obtain them from a federal archive). You can find bills online from 1983 forward on Folio, and from 1993 forward on BASIS.

Final Status of Bills

Starting in 1975, the Final Status of Bills[5] lists every bill introduced in a two-year session and gives information about the bill's status at the end of that session. More importantly, the bills are listed three times: by number, subject, and sponsor. This is important because it can tell you whether there was a companion bill to your bill. Sometimes, similar or identical bills are introduced simultaneously in the House and Senate; generally one fizzles out early while the other potentially passes. While you probably have the bill number for the bill that passed, there could be minutes or other materials for the companion bill, created before that bill was abandoned. Searching the Final Status of Bills by subject can help you identify any companion bills. One clue that there might be a companion bill is if your bill zipped through a committee more quickly than you'd expect or was not even referred to a committee you would expect to consider it.

The subject index of the Final Status of Bills can also tell you whether the same or similar bills were introduced in prior sessions. Sometimes controversial legislation takes a while to pass, and bills may have been introduced and discussed, without passing, before your successful bill came along. This subject index can help you gain a historical perspective on your bill.

Floor and Committee Recordings

Audio and video recordings of floor sessions and committee minutes are available with varying coverage. Committee recordings can be helpful because committee minutes vary in their level of detail; older minutes are often bare summaries, while more recent minutes are practically transcripts. You might also find committee tapes for meetings for which minutes do not exist. Floor tapes can similarly help flesh out the bare bones notes of the journals, which might indicate that an amendment was offered, or even debated, with little hint as to the details.

Committee audio tapes are available as early as 1971. Digital recordings started in 2005 and are posted on BASIS with committee

5. Final Status of Bills from 1975 on are available in print at Legislative Information Offices (LIOs) in Anchorage and Fairbanks; Law Libraries in Anchorage and Juneau; University of Alaska, Anchorage and Fairbanks; Alaska State Library, Legislative Reference Library, and Alaska State Archives. Starting in 1993, Final Status of Bills is available on BASIS. Other locations, such as other LIOs, the Loussac Library, and U.S. Courts Libraries may have records from 1985 on.

minutes. Audio tapes of floor sessions start in 1975, with digital recordings starting in 2010. Videotapes of selected floor debates and committee meetings were made from 1977 to 1989.

A public television program, Gavel to Gavel, recorded video and audio of floor sessions and committee meetings starting in 1996. These recordings are not official and may have been edited by adding or deleting material. Some tapes from the beginning of this period are available from the television station. Gavel to Gavel started streaming online in 2002; video was not archived, but audio recordings are available through BASIS.

Legislative Library Catalog

The Legislative Reference Library's online catalog is available on Folio Infobases. This collection, which includes material from 1953 forward, can be a rich source of background information for your research. It includes legislative staff memoranda and reports on major topics and transcripts of selected meetings, some of which are not available anywhere else. If you're researching an important topic, like the original drafting or a subsequent rewrite of an entire code or title, you may find helpful information here.

The catalog is the last database listed on the Folio landing page. Using the Query function, search the catalog by subject or bill number. If you run into trouble, contact the Legislative Reference Library for assistance.

Hail Mary Options

Sometimes you can find clues about legislative intent by searching non-legislative material. Law review articles, CLEs, the Bar Rag, or contemporary newspaper articles might discuss important legislative actions and point you in a new direction. In addition, individual legislators and executive agencies like the Department of Law may have created files on your bill or subject, which could potentially include information unavailable elsewhere. If you've followed the steps outlined in this article and want to search for additional material, contact the Legislative Reference Library or consult their Guide to Alaska Legislative History Materials, w3.legis.state.ak.us/docs/pdf/leghistory/Legh.pdf.

The Legislature's Websites: Folio and BASIS

As discussed above, the legislature's websites, Folio and BASIS, are the two online sources of legislative history material. Folio and BASIS have different strengths and weaknesses—BASIS is user-friendly, one-stop shopping, but it only goes back to 1993; Folio can be frustratingly opaque, but coverage in most databases extends back to the early 1980s, and the Legislative Reference Library's database goes back as far as 1953.

You can readily ascertain the content and coverage of material available on Folio by scanning the landing page, http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folio.asp. Databases include the Alaska Statutes back to 1993, the Alaska Constitution, all state Executive Orders, the Alaska State Administrative Journal from 1986 through 1999, and the current version of the Alaska Administrative Code. Note the disclaimer that the Infobases are not the official version of the statutes and regulations and may contain errors. Legislative history material includes session laws from 1981 forward, legislative resolves from 1983 forward, committee minutes from 1982 forward, bills and resolutions from 1983 forward, and journals from 1987 forward. Finally, Folio includes the Legislative Uniform Rules, the Legislative Library Catalog, and an online retrieval system for Legislative Research Requests.

While the coverage on BASIS, http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp, is far more limited than that of Folio, BASIS is truly a step forward in usability. Once you've stumbled through an Infobases search, you'll appreciate all that BASIS has to offer. The basic process of compiling legislative history on BASIS is outlined above, but BASIS has additional features as well. BASIS includes session laws, so if you don't know your bill number, you can easily look it up. Session laws are merely listed from 1993 to 2002, but full text is available starting in 2003. If you know neither your bill number nor your session law, you can search for bills by subject. The subject summary index includes all introduced bills, whether or not they passed. Another particularly helpful tool is the Statute Information Retrieval System (SIRS), with which you can search for any legislation affecting a particular statute. If you conduct this search in the most recent legislature, you can quickly determine whether your print version of the statute is still current. BASIS has lots of other features, including calendars, committee member information, and links to Gavel to Gavel. If you spend some time exploring the website, you'll likely find something helpful.

CONCLUSION

If you're still reading, congratulations. You now know more than you ever thought you would about researching Alaska legislative history. Possibly more than you wanted to know. At the end of the day, researching legislative history is not that difficult, though it can be tedious and time-consuming. Just remember that there are people here to help you. Librarians at the Alaska State Court Law Library and the Legislative Reference Library want to help, and we are happy to walk you through the process and offer tips on using print and online resources. Call us.

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