
Coates' Canons Blog: Changes to the Legislative Reporting Service

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The North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) returned to Raleigh last week to kick off the 2019-2020 biennium. Here at the School of Government, we are excited to announce that all of the legislative digests prepared by the staff at our Legislative Reporting Service will now be available for FREE to both government officials and the general public. Read on for more details about the changes to our services and website.

What is the Legislative Reporting Service (LRS)?

For more than 80 years, the School of Government (SOG) has been reviewing and summarizing legislation every day the NCGA is in session. These summaries, which we call “digests,” are neutral and nonpartisan. They do not explore the reasons a bill was introduced or the impact the bill will have on the state. Rather, they simply explain what the bill says or how an amendment or committee substitute proposes to change a previously filed version of the bill. LRS staff create digests of:

- filed bills,
- committee substitutes and amendments,
- floor amendments, and
- conference reports.

By reviewing these digests, you can get a quick idea of what a bill does. If you are interested in the nitty-gritty details, you can refer to the bill itself on the legislature’s website (www.ncleg.gov) and sometimes there are more detailed summaries for bills generated by staff in the NCGA’s Legislative Analysis Division.

Why are LRS digests free now?

For many years, the work of LRS has relied on three sources of funding – SOG, the NCGA’s Legislative Services Offices, and private subscriptions. The digests were historically available for free to all legislators, legislative staff, and other government officials but were available to the public only with a paid subscription. After consulting with the Legislative Services Office and others, we concluded that SOG should figure out a way to make these digests available for free to as many people as possible. To make this transition a reality, Christine Wunsche, the Director of the LRS office, led an effort with the LRS staff to redesign the staffing model for the office, the staff’s approach to digesting, and the overall workflow in the office.

Where can I find the LRS digests?

All of the digests are available online on both the NCGA website and the SOG’s LRS website. On the NCGA website, you can now find a link to “view bill digest” on every bill page. That link will redirect you to the digest housed on SOG’s LRS website (for example, see Senate Bill 1). On our website, lrs.sog.unc.edu, there are several different ways to access the digests:

- The Daily Bulletin: At the end of each legislative day, the staff compile all of the digests completed for that day in a single document called The Daily Bulletin. You can review it on the website or sign up to receive it by email each legislative day.
- Today’s Bills: This feature connects the LRS digests to the legislative calendar for each chamber so that all of the digests for bills to be discussed that day are collected in one place. This feature is quiet now because the legislature adjourned until January 30 but it will become much more active once legislators return to Raleigh to begin their work in earnest.

- **All Bills:** This is the comprehensive list of bills for each biennium. You can sort them by bill number, title, filing date, type of bill, last action, and last action date. You can also go back and look at bills from earlier sessions (through the 2011-12 session, when we transitioned the LRS digests online).
- **Trending Tracked Bills:** This new feature generates a list of the bills that are being tracked by other LRS subscribers (see discussion of bill tracking below). While the feature doesn't reveal any information about *who* is tracking a bill, it does show you the number of people who are tracking it.
- **Bill Categories:** When the LRS staff creates a digest, they assign "bill categories" or keywords – like "health" or "higher education." If you are interested in reviewing digests that have been assigned a particular keyword, you can click on that "bill category" and all of the digests that have been tagged with that term will appear.
- **Statutes/Counties:** LRS staff also tag each digest with every Chapter of the General Statutes that is changed in the bill. For example, if you work in a field related to juvenile law and want to check in on bills that propose to change Chapter 7B, you can simply click on "7B." LRS staff also tag each bill that has an appropriation or a constitutional amendment. Finally, they tag any bill that identifies a specific county, so you can click on a county name (for example, "Camden") to find every bill that names that county.

Does the LRS website allow for bill tracking?

Yes – and more! LRS also offers two incredibly useful customizable features – My Bills and My Monitors. If you sign up for a FREE subscription to the site, you can:

- track individual bills by putting them in your "My Bills" folder and
- keep an eye out for new bills that affect particular chapters of the General Statutes or have been tagged with particular keywords or counties.

For example, suppose I heard that someone is considering introducing new legislation addressing animal shelters. I can set up one of my eight Monitors to scan for bills that are tagged with the keyword "animal" or I can scan for bills that would affect Chapter 19A ("Protection of Animals"). Once I see a bill pop up in My Monitor that I'm interested in, I click on "Track Bill" and it will put the bill in my "My Bills" folder so I can keep an eye on it throughout the session.

Please know that if you had an LRS subscription in the past, you will need to create a new account password in order to use these two extra features. You can do so by clicking on the "Request new password" link on the menu on the left hand side of the screen (under the "Log in"). If you didn't have an account before but are interested in setting one up, simply click on the "Create New Account" link in the same general location. If you have any problems setting up an account or creating a new password, please contact the LRS Office at (919) 733-2484.

We hope you appreciate these changes, use the website regularly, and share the resource with others.

Links

- www.ncleg.gov
- www.ncleg.gov/
- www.ncleg.gov/BillLookUp/2019/s1
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/lrs-subscr-view/list_daily_bulletins
- lists.unc.edu/read/all_forums/subscribe?name=daily_bulletin_notifications
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/lrs-subscr-view/todaysbills_house
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/lrs-subscr-view/list_bills
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/lrs-subscr-view/tracked-bills
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/lrs-subscr/lrs-bill-categories
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/lrs-subscr/lrs-statutes-counties
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/statutescounties/gs-7b
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/statutescounties/approp
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/statutescounties/const
- lrs.sog.unc.edu/statutescounties/camden