

AALL LISP North Carolina Public Library Toolkit

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This toolkit is for public library staff seeking legal resources to help patrons access the law in North Carolina. North Carolina law consists of the state constitution, statutes, regulations, local ordinances, and the precedent decisions of state and federal high courts.

To address common types of patron needs like landlord-tenant, divorce, or custody issues, the guide [Legal Help in North Carolina](#) may better help patrons find specific guidance and representation. Non-lawyers doing legal research should start with [How to Research a Legal Problem: A Guide for Non-Lawyers](#). This toolkit focuses on locating foundational NC legal materials, giving preference to free sources available on the internet.

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I. State Constitution

The current North Carolina Constitution (of 1971, as amended) is available online at the [NC General Assembly website](#).

It is also available in print in the *General Statutes of North Carolina Annotated*. The constitution may also be found in *West's North Carolina General Statutes Annotated*. Both sources have the same law, but *General Statutes of North Carolina Annotated* is the version commissioned by the state.

II. State Statutes

A. State Session Laws

In North Carolina, bills get a session law number after they are passed and processed (enrolled, ratified, and approved). The numbered bills passed during a legislative session are then published in sequential order in the *Session Laws of North Carolina* by the Legislative Services Commission. That publication contains all laws and joint resolutions passed in each regular and extra session of the General Assembly.

The session laws may be found online at the [North Carolina General Assembly's web site](#), beginning with the 1961-1962 session for Public Laws, and the 1959-1960 session for Local Laws.

B. State Statutory Codes

Statutory codes are all the laws in effect at a given time. They are organized by subject to make it easier for people to locate laws relevant to a specific situation. North Carolina statutory codes are called the North Carolina General Statutes.

1. Unannotated Codes (statutory text only)
 - a. The current North Carolina General Statutes may be found online at the [General Assembly's page](#).
2. Annotated Statutory Codes). Some code versions include "annotations," research materials such as court cases, law review articles, and regulations related to a particular law. Because the annotations are owned by private companies, they are not freely available online. However, patrons can access print versions in some law libraries or walk into the library to access online versions.

LexisNexis publishes the official General Statutes of North Carolina, Annotated.

West publishes an unofficial version of the statutes called West's North Carolina General Statutes Annotated.

III. State Bills

Most bills do not become law. Those that become law sometimes are changed over time. To find a bill as it was introduced or amended by the NC General Assembly, use their bill search page. Bills are available on the [NC General Assembly site](#) beginning with 1985-1986 session.

To find a bill by its bill number visit the [Bill Lookup](#) section of the site.

For older bills contact the [North Carolina Legislative Library](#).

IV. State Administrative Law

Regulations are the detailed rules that executive government agencies create to carry out laws. When an agency creates a new regulation or changes an existing regulation, they frequently publish the changes as proposed regulations and then as final regulations/rules. NC regulations are first published in the North Carolina Register. Then they are organized by subject into the North Carolina Administrative Code (NCAC). Agencies also make decisions about how to apply regulations. Those decisions, court decisions, and the regulations themselves make up what we call "administrative law."

A. State Register: The North Carolina Register

The *North Carolina Register* is a bimonthly publication of temporary, proposed, permanent and emergency regulations. The *Register* also contains executive orders of the Governor.

The *Register* began publication in 1986. It is available online from the [North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings](#). Online access is available for all volumes.

B. State Administrative Code: The North Carolina Administrative Code (NCAC)

The NCAC is available online from the [North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings](#).

The NCAC is available in print from Thomson West (a Thomson Reuters company).

C. State Administrative Decisions

Hearings from various state agencies may be found online from the [North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings](#). Search options are limited and may only go back to approx. 2001.

Since 1998, administrative decisions have been published as separate volumes of the NCAC. They are also included in the monthly updates to the NCAC.

V. County/Municipal/City Codes

Municipal codes of many North Carolina cities and counties are available online from the [Municipal Code Corporation](#). Not all municipalities have codes there. To find codes not available there, check with your local public or law library.

VI. State Jury Instructions

In a jury trial, the judge instructs the jury on the law to apply, definitions of key terms, and how they should conduct their deliberations. Some judicial or bar organizations issue model or sample jury instructions for specific types of trials. The model instructions are called “pattern jury instructions.” In North Carolina, the Pattern Jury Instruction Committee, consisting of trial judges, creates those model instructions. The UNC School of Government (SOG) assists them, and their work is supported by the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts.

The SOG provides free access to PDF copies of NC Pattern Jury Instructions for civil, criminal, and motor vehicle cases, and supplements to those instructions via their online library [here](#).

- [North Carolina Pattern Jury Instructions for Civil Cases](#)
- [North Carolina Pattern Jury Instructions for Criminal Cases](#)
- [North Carolina Pattern Jury Instructions for Motor Vehicle Cases](#)

Each of the pattern jury instruction sets are published in digital (non-PDF) format, and in print. For information on available formats visit the SOG site [here](#). Check with the nearest law library to access print copies.

VII. State Legal Forms

A. Official State Court Forms

Courts often provide forms that they either encourage or require litigants to use to initiate and engage in a court case. Forms from the North Carolina Judicial Branch can be found [on their site](#).

B. Online North Carolina Legal Forms for Self-Represented Persons

[This guide](#) links to various court and administrative agency forms.

C. North Carolina Form Books

These books provide sample forms for contracts, court filings, and more. They are available online to subscribers of digital legal databases such as Westlaw or Lexis+, or for e-book purchase. They may also be available at a local law library.

- *Douglas' Forms* contains hundreds of basic forms intended to serve as models or drafting guides. It also contains the official forms published by the North Carolina Judicial Branch. *Douglas' Forms* is available on LexisNexis.
- Kimberly T. Miller, *North Carolina Manual of Complaints*, 7th ed., Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Advocates for Justice; LexisNexis, 2017.
- William L. Thorp, *Thorp's North Carolina Trial Practice Forms*, 7th ed., St. Paul, MN: The Harrison Company (a Thomson Reuters company), c2011.

VIII. State Legal Encyclopedia

Legal encyclopedias explain legal terms and give information about the law in a jurisdiction. The legal encyclopedia for North Carolina is called *Strong's North Carolina Index*. It is available on Westlaw and in print. Your local law library may have the set in print.

Strong's North Carolina Index 4th: an encyclopedic treatment of North Carolina law, St. Paul, Minn.: Lawyers Cooperative Publishing (Thomson Reuters), c2007-2020. *Strong's* is kept up to date by pocket parts, revised volumes, and cumulative update service.

IX. North Carolina Cases

Case law (caselaw) is the law formed by written court decisions (opinions) that interpret statutes, regulations, and other law. High court decisions become part of the law of a jurisdiction. North Carolina publishes case law from its appellate courts (the North Carolina Court of Appeals and the North Carolina Supreme Court). North Carolina does not have a trial-level case reporter.

A. NC Records, Briefs & E-Filings (NC Supreme Court, NC Court of Appeals, and NC Business Court)

You can search and access some documents filed in NC Supreme Court, NC Court of Appeals and NC Business Court cases via the court system's electronic filing system [here](#). Available documents may include the docket sheet, which lists actions taken and documents filed, motions, briefs from the parties to the appeal, record on appeal, and orders and opinions issued by the court.

Print copies of Supreme Court and Court of Appeals records and briefs are available from some of the state's law school libraries (with varying degrees of coverage in print and/or microform), including the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wake Forest University, Duke University, North Carolina Central, and Campbell University.

B. North Carolina Supreme Court Case Decisions

- Online - To access opinions of this court, visit the NC Judicial Branch's [Supreme Court page](#). Coverage begins in 1998.
- Print - You can find opinions in print at a local law library.
 - North Carolina Reports – Official NC Supreme Court case reporter published by the state.
 - South Eastern Reporter – Unofficial case reporter that contains case law from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and West Virginia.

C. North Carolina Court of Appeals Case Decisions

- Online – to access opinions of this court, visit the [NC Judicial Branch's Court of Appeals page](#). Coverage begins in 1998.
- Print - You can find opinions in print at a local law library.
 - North Carolina Court of Appeals Reports – Official case reporter published by the state.
 - South Eastern Reporter – Unofficial case reporter that contains case law from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and West Virginia.

D. North Carolina Business Court Decisions

Select decisions, beginning with cases filed in October, 1996 are available [here](#).

E. Federal Case Decisions

Federal case law is published in separate publications according to level of court:

- U.S. Supreme Court cases are published in the official U.S. reports and in several commercial reporters, including ones published by West and LexisNexis.
- Federal district court cases are published in West's Federal Supplement (currently in its second series, F. Supp. 2d).
- Federal appellate cases are published in West's Federal Reporter (currently in its third series, F.3d).
- Federal cases that a court has deemed to not have the effect of law, except upon the parties to that case, are often called "unreported" cases. However, they are sometimes published online or in the print reporter Federal Appendix, published by West.

Many federal case decisions are available freely online via various sites:

- [Justia](#) – Law librarians respect this site as a reliable source for legal information, including case law. It provides links to case decisions as well as summary information about many cases, and about federal justices.
- Google Scholar's [Case Law](#) search page. This [guide from the Library of Congress](#) gives an overview of the scope of cases covered by Google Scholar.

Several other sites provide access to U.S. Supreme Court, and U.S. Courts of Appeals cases. Other case decisions will require access to a legal platform like LexisNexis or Westlaw, or a visit to a local law library.

X. KeyCite, Shepards, Digests & Case Research Tools

Digests are a dying tool of case law research that uses hierarchical organization structures to find all the cases on a given topic. Digests have largely been supplanted by online tools such as KeyCite, Shepards, and various other sophisticated citation analysis tools that allow you to slice, dice, and sort large databases of case decisions in a variety of ways. Most databases are available by subscription or by access at local law libraries.

XI. Legal Research Guidance & Assistance

A. American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) & Southeast Chapter

AALL is the national association that serves, guides, and provides continuing legal education to the legal information and law library community throughout the U.S. and Canada. It is connected to legal information and law library associations throughout the world. North Carolina librarians often engage with the Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries ([SEAALL](#)). To find law libraries or legal resources, you can visit [AALL's Public Legal Resource page](#).

B. Law Libraries in North Carolina

If you have a legal research question, North Carolina's academic and government law libraries may be able to help. Here below is contact information for several:

- [Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law](#)
 - Circulation Desk: 919-865-5869
- [Duke University Goodson Law Library](#)
 - Circulation Desk: 919-613-7128
- [Elon University School of Law Library](#)
 - Circulation Desk: 336-279-9341
- [North Carolina Central University School of Law Library](#)
 - Circulation Desk: 919-530-5189
- [North Carolina Legislative Library](#) in the Legislative Building:
 - 919-733-9390
- [North Carolina Supreme Court Library](#)
 - General Information: 919-831-5709
- [State Library of North Carolina](#)
 - (919) 733-4376 (local)
 - Toll-Free: 1-888-388-2460 (outside Raleigh)
 - E-MAIL: nclbph@ncdcr.gov
- [University of North Carolina School of Law, Katherine R. Everett Law Library](#)
 - Circulation Desk: 919.962.1191
- [Wake Forest University Law Library](#)
 - Main Number/Circulation Desk: 336-758-5438

XII. Federal Depository Libraries in North Carolina

If you seek print copies of federal government materials, there are several selective depositories in North Carolina. Their contact information and websites are available through the [Federal Depository Library Directory website](#) (choose North Carolina).

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is the [regional depository for North Carolina](#) .

XIII. North Carolina Bar Associations

A. [North Carolina State Bar](#)

- The North Carolina State Bar is the state agency responsible for regulating the practice of law in North Carolina.
- The NCSB connects people to lawyers via the [Find a Lawyer directory](#)
- [North Carolina Rules of Professional Conduct](#)
- To check a lawyer's disciplinary record, or report a problem, go to the [Lawyer Discipline](#) page.

B. [North Carolina Bar Association](#)

- The North Carolina Bar Association (NCBA) is a voluntary organization of lawyers, paralegals and law students dedicated to serving the public and the legal profession. The N.C. Bar Center in Cary serves as headquarters for the NCBA and the NCBA Foundation, Inc. ***Though their missions overlap, the NCBA and the mandatory North Carolina State Bar are not affiliated.***
- The NCBA connects people to lawyers via the [Lawyer Referral Service](#)

C. County/Judicial District Bar Associations – There are regional and specialized bar associations in North Carolina. Below are links to just some of the regional associations.

- [Buncombe County Bar](#)
- [Durham Bar Association](#)
- [Forsyth County Bar Association and 31st Judicial District Bar](#)
- [Greensboro Bar Association](#)
- [Mecklenburg County Bar, 26th Judicial District](#)
- [Tenth Judicial District Bar and Wake County Bar Association](#)

XIV. North Carolina Research Guides

A. Research Guides by North Carolina Law Schools

- [Elon Law Library Research Guides](#)
- Goodson Law Library, Duke University School of Law [Research Guides](#). Of particular note is the [Legal Research for Non-Lawyers guide](#).
- Katherine R. Everett Law Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill [Research Guides](#).
- Wake Forest University School of Law [Legal Research Pathfinders](#).

B. Books on North Carolina Legal Research

- *North Carolina Legal Research*, by Brenda D. Gibson, Julie L. Kimbrough, Laura P. Graham, Nichelle J. Perry (3rd ed., 2019).
- *North Carolina Legal Research Guide*, by Scott Childs & Nick Sexton (2nd ed., Hein 2009).