

CHAPTER 13: INFORMATION CENTERS

Introduction

This chapter describes important information centers for legislators and citizens who want information about the Legislature or legislation. Appendix A complements this chapter, providing details about where to go to find additional information in general and also identifying resources on various topics chapter by chapter.

Legislative Information Office

The Legislative Information Office is an excellent resource for legislators, the media, and the general public. It is staffed during sessions and interims. The office serves several primary functions:

- ✓ **Legislator education, training, and outreach.** The legislative information officer (LIO) serves as a staff liaison to help new legislators get acclimated. In conjunction with the Executive Director of the Legislative Services Division and other staff, the LIO develops training sessions, briefing materials, and publications to help educate legislators about staff services, the legislative process, and government programs.
- ✓ **Media education and outreach.** The LIO serves as legislative liaison to the media, facilitating access to appropriate spokespersons, distributing news releases,

educating media about the legislative process, and maintaining a list of print and broadcast media contacts in the state.

- ✓ **Public outreach and civic education.** The LIO handles a wide range of information requests from the public. The LIO oversees development and distribution of publications, website content, and other materials to promote civic education about the legislative institution and representative democracy.

Session Information Desk

During sessions, the Session Information Desk serves as a one-stop point of contact for Montanans wanting to communicate with their legislators or learn more about the legislative process. Staff members serve two primary functions:

- ✓ **Relaying messages from citizens to legislators.** Staff members answer telephone calls, record messages for legislators, and forward messages to legislators. Messages are maintained on a database, and a copy of any message can be produced upon request. Staff also process and forward messages that are submitted to legislators via an online message form on the legislative website.

- ✓ **Providing information to citizens about the Legislature and legislative activities.** Staff members are trained to answer questions from citizens about the status of bills and resolutions, dates and times of committee hearings, committee membership, and other session-related information. The Session Information Desk distributes hearing calendars, agendas, seating charts, and other useful printed materials.

■ Legislative Branch Website (<http://leg.mt.gov/>)

■ Overview

The website for the Legislative Branch offers a wealth of information about the Montana Legislature. Highlights of the website include:

- ✓ an up-to-date, comprehensive database of legislative session information available through the LAWS (described in the next section);
- ✓ information about the work and membership of interim and other statutory committees;
- ✓ information about the Legislature and legislators, including contact information;
- ✓ Montana laws, including the Montana Constitution;
- ✓ selected reports and publications;
- ✓ legislative and civics information for students and classrooms; and
- ✓ resources for legislators.

■ Session Information Through LAWS

A section of the Legislative Branch website is dedicated to each session of the Legislature. LAWS, the Legislative Automated Workflow System, is a free, up-to-date, and comprehensive database available anytime to anyone with Internet access. By clicking on the menu item entitled "Sessions" and then on the specific year, individuals can obtain:

- ✓ the text and status of bills and resolutions;
- ✓ information about session committees, including membership, staff, agendas, and scheduled hearings;
- ✓ journals and floor actions for each house;
- ✓ fiscal notes;
- ✓ floor votes;
- ✓ an index of bills and resolutions by subject; and
- ✓ reports listing bills and resolutions.

Status information is added to the LAWS by automated processes or by trained operators, when needed, as the bills make their way through the legislative process. This is most often done immediately after actions occur. Consequently, the LAWS is an invaluable source of up-to-date information for persons interested in the Legislature's activities, whether they are legislative staff working in the Capitol or an interested citizen on a ranch in southeastern Montana.

Using advanced search functions, individuals with Internet access can

generate lists of bills, resolutions, and draft requests tailored to their interests. Search criteria include legislative requester, primary sponsor, drafter, subject, committee, and status.

Any person with Internet access may generate lists of bills, resolutions, and draft requests that are tailored to the user's interest, using advanced search functions. Search criteria include requester, primary sponsor, drafter, subject, committee, and status.

Internet users who wish to track specific legislation may sign up for "preference list" service. This free service allows users to create, modify, and save their own tailored list of bills, resolutions, and draft requests. Once a list file is created, the user can click on a button to display the latest status of each bill, resolution, or draft request in the list, along with the short title and requester or primary sponsor.

Bill text may be viewed in "html" format or retrieved either in WordPerfect 5.1 format or in a portable document format (pdf). The "pdf" copy maintains the same page and line relationships as the printed bill used in the legislative process.

By displaying the legislator's own page, a legislator is able not only to monitor the bills with which the legislator is associated (i.e., bills sponsored and/or requested), the legislator is also able to view a list of bills that are currently scheduled for hearing for which the legislator is the primary sponsor. There is also a list of bills that are currently scheduled for hearing in committees on which the legislator is a member.

■ Legislative Reference Center

The Legislative Reference Center provides reference and research assistance and interlibrary loan services to legislators and legislative staff. The collection focuses on issues of current concern to the Montana Legislature, including such topics as economic development, education finance, health care policy, gambling, privatization, taxation, state employee compensation, state finances, and workers' compensation. The collection contains approximately 1,500 books and 500 periodicals for legislators' use.

The library catalog is online and searchable, as is an index of state and national newspaper clippings and an index of articles of interest organized by topic. The Legislative Reference Center staff has also been busy inputting staff legal and research memos into the publications database available via the legislative website at <http://leg.mt.gov>; this is a new service. Previously, these memos have not been available electronically to legislators.

The Legislative Reference Center also offers access to Montana legislative materials, such as current and past Senate and House journals, session laws, bills, committee minutes, and exhibits. Staff will compile legislative histories for legislators. Materials and reports published by the Legislative Services Division, along with interim committee work papers, are cataloged and archived. Constitutional Convention proceedings are available in the

Legislative Reference Center, as well as Montana Attorney General opinions, state and federal case law, and statutes. The Legislative Reference Center also contains past and present Montana Code Annotated volumes, administrative rules, and legislator directories. Publications from the National Conference of State Legislatures and from legislative agencies in other states form a major part of the collection.

Items in the Legislative Reference Center that may be of special interest to new legislators include the National Conference of State Legislatures "How to Be an Effective Legislator" audiotope series. Created by experts, the tapes and guides are available for legislators to borrow. The series addresses the following subjects:

- ✓ mastering the legislative process;
- ✓ managing the budget;
- ✓ working with staff and lobbyists;
- ✓ serving constituents; and
- ✓ chairing a committee.

The Legislative Reference Center also has other audiotapes and videotapes for legislators' use, including such titles as "Tips and Strategies for Becoming an Effective Health Lawmaker", "Communicating Effectively Through the Media", and "Cultivating a More Diverse Economy in Rural Areas".

There are two computers with unrestricted access in the Legislative Reference Center for legislators' use. Staff will also help legislators access and use subscription research and legal websites and databases. Staff can also scan documents for legislators. Legislators are encouraged to contact the

staff in the Legislative Reference Center for assistance with obtaining any information needed for legislative activities and law-related research.

■ Montana State Library

The Montana State Library serves the work-related, informational needs of state employees in partnership with the other more specialized agency libraries. Collection strengths include electronic journals and references related to natural resources, environment and conservation, government, health and social services, information science and technology, and personnel management.

The library maintains a permanent comprehensive collection of state publications and an inventory of federal publications selected for their pertinence to Montana state government. The library circulates resources to the public. See <http://msl.mt.gov>.

The library's Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) provides GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping, technical assistance and access to geospatial data, and research information concerning Montana's climate and water, plant, and wildlife resources.

■ State Law Library

The State Law Library's collections and services are used by the Montana Supreme Court Justices and their law clerks, state and private attorneys, state employees, students, and the general public.



The library's 180,000-volume collection includes: Montana's territorial and state codes and session laws, administrative regulations, Supreme Court opinions and briefs, current codes, historical session laws, and appellate court decisions from all 50 states; federal statutes, session laws, administrative rules, and cases; legal encyclopedias and dictionaries; many subject-based treatises; over 500 law review and bar journals; and a large number of legal forms.

The Law Library's website, <http://lawlibrary.mt.gov>, provides links to many sample legal forms; Montana and federal laws, including Supreme Court opinions, orders, and briefs; and research links on dozens of topics. Patrons can search or browse the library's materials online from any computer by visiting its website. Any Montana resident may borrow materials.

■ Montana Historical Society Research Center

The MHS Research Center, <http://montanahistoricalsociety.org>, serves the general public, state agency employees, academic researchers, students, and genealogists. The MHS

Research Center is a special collections facility that collects published and unpublished materials that reflect and document the history and prehistory of Montana and the region. The collection consists of state documents, books, archival records and oral histories, manuscript collections, legislative records, historic photographs, and maps. The MHS Research Center also holds 95% of the newspapers published in Montana, both historic and current.

■ Census and Economic Information Center

The Census and Economic Information Center provides state employees and legislators access to and education on using census, economic, geographic, and business data for Montana from a variety of federal and state statistical resources. See <http://ceic.mt.gov>.

Patrons have access to Montana data/thematic maps and may have a custom data map created for a specific project. The collection includes historical, demographic and economic data, current electronic data (DVD/CD), and print documents.