

# Tracking legislation at the General Assembly

## Locating bills of interest and then tracking them

9/26/17

By Megan Rhyne

(This is the second in a two-part series on tracking proposed legislation. Read the first part [here](#).)

For my last blog entry I wrote about how you at home can watch the legislative process unfold: how the committee system is structured, how a committee meeting works, how to watch the floor sessions of either the House or Senate, and what to make of all of those tradition-bound terms and phrases.

Today I'm writing about tracking legislation on your own. How do you identify bills you'd like to follow, and how do you know at what stage in the process a bill is in? I'll also talk about how you track individual legislators to see what types of bills they've introduced and how they voted on other measures.

The [General Assembly's Legislative Information System \(LIS\)](#) is really quite packed with data, and all of it pretty well cross-referenced and linked. I've not done a comprehensive comparison of other state websites, but I've seen self-reported surveys on legislative websites, and Virginia's site seems to measure among the best. Considering the breakneck speed of the legislative session, it is nothing short of miraculous that the good folks at LIS keep the site both useful and up to date.

Take a look around the LIS landing page to get started. You'll notice various ways to approach your search, whether you're looking for bills on specific topics (A), bills by number (B), bills by individual legislator (C), bills in a particular committee (D), or even bills by key word (E). (You'll notice, after you've poked around the site a bit, that there are often multiple ways to get at the same thing.)



## VIRGINIA'S LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM

### SEARCH SITE

enter keyword here

GO



### QUICK LINKS



### OTHER SESSIONS



**LOBBYIST in a BOX**  
Free bill tracking service



### VIRGINIA LAW PORTAL

[Code of Virginia](#)

[Virginia Administrative Code](#)

[Constitution of Virginia](#)

[Charters](#)

[Authorities](#)

[Compacts](#)

[Uncodified Acts](#)

[RIS Users](#) (account required)

### SEARCHABLE DATABASES

[Bills & Resolutions](#)  
session legislation



[Bill Summaries](#)  
session summaries

[Reports to the General Assembly](#)  
House and Senate documents

## 2017 SESSION

Convened January 11, 2017

[Bills & Resolutions](#): Status of individual bills and related information



[General Assembly Members](#): Member sponsored legislation



[Standing Committees](#): Legislation referred to committee



[State Budget](#): Budget bills, committees and summaries

[Daily Floor Calendars](#): Legislative agendas

[Communications](#): Legislation communicated between houses

[House Minutes / Senate Minutes](#): Records of floor sessions

Text

[Meetings](#): House and Senate committee meeting schedule

[Statistics](#): Session statistics

[Lobbyist-in-a-Box](#): Subscription-based bill tracking service

[Cumulative Index](#): Subject index of bills and resolutions



## New Virginia Budget Portal

Effective December 17, 2015, the new Virginia **State Budget** portal is now on-line. To ensure prompt access to the Virginia State Budget, please update existing Bookmarks, Favorites, and Budget references etc., to reflect the new Virginia Budget Portal address of <http://budget.lis.virginia.gov>.

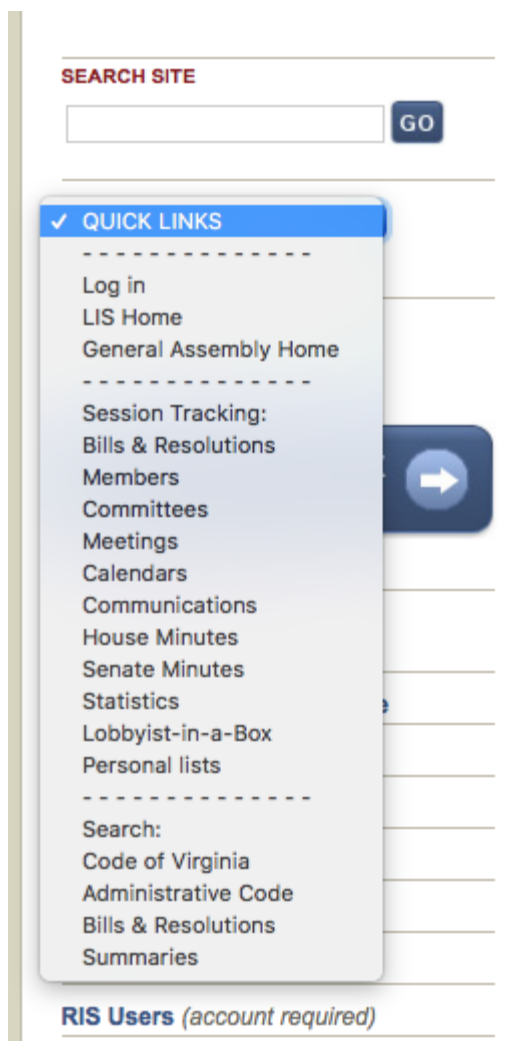
If you access the Virginia State Budget through any web address that contains any variation of the old address, <http://leg2.state.va.us/Moneyweb.nsf/> you will need to update those Bookmarks, Favorites or Budget references to the new Virginia State Budget portal.

These examples from the 2006 session will help you with making these updates:

**OLD Budget site**

**NEW Budget site**

Wherever you go on the LIS site, the sidebar on the left remains, meaning you can quickly jump to any one of menu options by clicking on the "QUICK LINKS" drop-down menu or for searching databases.



To look up bills by your area of interest, I recommend going two places first: the bills & resolutions database (A) or the Bills & Resolutions menu option (B).

The database allows you to browse an alphabetical subject index (the link is highlighted below the search box) — from administration of government to workers compensation — or to type in a keyword or key phrase you're interested.

Here's a results page after I typed in the phrase "freedom of information."

# Bills and Resolutions search result

Your search found **610** references in **287** documents. The number of references follows each document description. Perform another search or look at some [examples](#) to help you refine your search.

all types

submit

exclude failed legislation ☐

<a href="#">HB452 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Energy Storage Consortium; created, report... (1)
<a href="#">HB969 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Retail Sales and Use Tax Act; conforms the Commonwealth's sales and use.. (1)
<a href="#">HB1113 (show hits)</a> ..Prescription drugs; price transparency... (1)
<a href="#">HB1388 (show hits)</a> ..State agencies; review of potential anti-competitive actions and promulgation of.. (1)
<a href="#">HB1389 (show hits)</a> ..FOIA; record exclusion for trade secrets submitted to Department of Mines, Minera.. (4)
<a href="#">HB1410H1 (show hits)</a> ..Higher educational institutions, baccalaureate public; enrollment of non-Virginia.. (3)
<a href="#">HB1410H2 (show hits)</a> ..Higher educational institutions, baccalaureate public; enrollment of non-Virginia.. (3)
<a href="#">HB1410 (show hits)</a> ..Higher educational institutions, baccalaureate public; enrollment of non-Virginia.. (2)
<a href="#">HB1501 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Retail Sales and Use Tax Act... (1)
<a href="#">CHAP0314 (show hits)</a> ..Revision and recodification of Title 23; corrections... (1)
<a href="#">HB1538ER (show hits)</a> ..Revision and recodification of Title 23; corrections... (1)
<a href="#">HB1538 (show hits)</a> ..Revision and recodification of Title 23; corrections... (1)
<a href="#">HB1538E (show hits)</a> ..Revision and recodification of Title 23; corrections... (1)
<a href="#">HB1539 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to records of public bodies... (20)
<a href="#">CHAP0778 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to records of public bodies... (20)
<a href="#">HB1539ER2 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to records of public bodies... (20)
<a href="#">HB1539ER (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to records of public bodies... (20)
<a href="#">HB1539H1 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to records of public bodies... (20)
<a href="#">HB1540 (show hits)</a> ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to meetings of public bodies... (7)

You'll notice that each bill or resolution is given a prefix (HB, HJR, HR, SB, SJR, SR) followed by a number. Each bill is also given a title that is supposed to be a brief description of what it does, and a summary that is a bit more in depth.

If you want to click on any one of these options, you have the choice to view it in its normal format, or in a format that highlights the keyword or phrase you just searched for.

You can perform the exact same keyword search from the "Bill Summaries" option under the "Searchable Databases" on the left of the page to yield results where your keyword may appear in the summary but not in the title.

## Summaries search result

Perform another search or look at some [examples](#) to help you refine your search.

freedom of information	submit
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**HB1389** ..FOIA; record exclusion for trade secrets submitted to Department of Mines, Minerals and Ene..

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**HB1539** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to records of public bodies...

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**HB1540** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to meetings of public bodies...

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**HB1587** ..Uniform Statewide Building Code; security of certain records...

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**HB1678** ..FOIA; trade secrets submitted to the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy...

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**HB1679** ..Well permit applications; disclosure of trade secrets...

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**HB1701** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory (FOIA) Council; membership...

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**HB1734** ..Virginia Parole Board; exceptions to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)...

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**HB1876** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to library records of minors...

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**HB1932** ..Virginia Freedom of Information (FOIA) Advisory Council; terms of nonlegislative citizen me..

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**HB1971** ..FOIA; record and meeting exclusions for multidisciplinary child abuse teams...

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**HB2043** ..Law-enforcement officer; public release of identifying information, etc...

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**HB2108** ..Virginia Wireless Services Authority Act; rates and charges...

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**HB2143** ..FOIA; training approved by Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council, online courses..

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**HB2144** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council; increases membership, effect of missing m..

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**HB2146** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council; online public comment form...

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**HB2178** ..FOIA; proprietary records and trade secrets, charitable gaming supplies...

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**HB2223** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; right to speak at open meetings...

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**HB2245** ..Virginia Research Investment Committee; expands role of Committee...

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**HB2401** ..Virginia Freedom of Information Act; minutes of closed meetings required, audio recordings...

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You can then browse these results to find bills that you would like to follow through the session.

If you already know the number (name) of the bill you're interested in, you want to click on the "Bills & Resolutions" option (B). You will then see a page with a search box (I) where you can type the bill number in (no need for capitalization or for spaces between letters and numbers).

# 2017 SESSION

Search by bill number:   examples: hb1, sj2, ch3, hr\*

## VIEW BILLS BY CATEGORY

### INTRODUCED

[All legislation](#)

[By Member](#) **II**

[By Committee](#) **III**

[By subject](#)

[By day](#) **IV**

[Most frequently accessed](#)

### PASSED

[Passed the House](#)

[Passed the Senate](#)

[Passed](#)

[Enrolled](#)

[Signed by Speaker & President](#)

### FAILED OR AWAITING ACTION

[Failed](#)

[Pending](#)

[Continued from last session](#)

### SENT TO CONFERENCE

[In conference](#)

[Conference report agreed to](#)

[Conference report rejected](#)

### GOVERNOR

[Governor's recommendations](#)

[Governor's recommendations adopted](#)

[Approved or enacted](#)

[Vetoed](#)

[Acts of Assembly chapters](#)

There are a couple of other useful links both for finding bills and for analyzing them. If you're interested in a particular topic, you may want to view all bills by committee (III) or again by subject matter. You may want to know about all the bills your legislator (or someone else you're following) has filed (II). It's even interesting to see the bills as they are filed day-by-day (IV). You'll see many different ways to view the bills by what stage they are in the process, including those that have failed.

So, say I want to look up HB1876 from my list of bill number results (granted, I could have clicked on that bill from the results page -- see what I mean about lots of ways to get to the same place?). This is the page I get, and here's where the real meat and potatoes of the bill is.



# HB 1876 Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to library records of minors. **1**

Introduced by: [Brenda L. Poyge](#) [all patrons](#) ... [notes](#) | [add to my profiles](#)

**3**

## SUMMARY AS INTRODUCED:

Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to library records of minors. Excludes from mandatory disclosure library records that can be used to identify any library patron under the age of 18 years. The bill provides that access shall not be denied to the parent, including a noncustodial parent, or guardian of such library patron. **2**

## FULL TEXT

01/10/17 House: Prefiled and ordered printed; offered 01/11/17 17101865D pdf | impact statement **4**

03/07/17 House: Bill text as passed House and Senate (HB1876ER) pdf | impact statement **5**

03/20/17 Governor: Acts of Assembly Chapter text (CHAP0642) pdf **6**

## HISTORY **7**

01/10/17 House: Prefiled and ordered printed; offered 01/11/17 17101865D

01/10/17 House: Referred to Committee on General Laws

01/16/17 House: Assigned GL sub: Subcommittee #2

01/26/17 House: Subcommittee recommends reporting (7-Y 0-N)

02/02/17 House: Reported from General Laws (20-Y 0-N) **8**

02/04/17 House: Read first time

02/06/17 House: Read second time and engrossed

02/07/17 House: Read third time and passed House BLOCK VOTE (97-Y 0-N)

02/07/17 House: VOTE: BLOCK VOTE PASSAGE (97-Y 0-N)

02/08/17 Senate: Constitutional reading dispensed

02/08/17 Senate: Referred to Committee on General Laws and Technology

02/10/17 Senate: Assigned GL&T sub: #1

02/20/17 Senate: Reported from General Laws and Technology (15-Y 0-N)

02/21/17 Senate: Constitutional reading dispensed (39-Y 0-N)

02/22/17 Senate: Read third time

02/22/17 Senate: Passed Senate (40-Y 0-N)

03/07/17 House: Enrolled

03/07/17 House: Bill text as passed House and Senate (HB1876ER)

03/07/17 House: Signed by Speaker

03/10/17 Senate: Signed by President

03/13/17 House: Enrolled Bill communicated to Governor on 3/13/17

03/13/17 Governor: Governor's Action Deadline Midnight, March 27, 2017

03/20/17 Governor: Approved by Governor-Chapter 642 (effective 7/1/17)

03/20/17 Governor: Acts of Assembly Chapter text (CHAP0642)

You'll see the bill number and title (1) and its summary (2). You'll also see the name of the bill's patron, the legislator who is carrying the bill (3). There is a link to the full text of the bill when it was introduced (4). At the start of the session, this is the only link, but as the session progresses, you will see links added to amended or substituted versions of the bill, as well as — in this case — the final version that was passed by the House and Senate (5) and signed by the governor (6).

Clicking on the first link under the "FULL TEXT" heading will give you the bill in its online, HTML format, which in turn gives you options for viewing just the condensed history, a PDF version of the bill or a "hilite" version, which shows new language highlighted in yellow, and language that is being struck from existing law highlighted and struck through in red.

A PDF version is helpful for debates about specific wording of a bill. Someone may say, "on page one, line 40 where it says 'parent,' should we insert the word 'grandparent'?" and everyone listening knows exactly where in the bill to look.



17101865D

**HOUSE BILL NO. 1876**

Offered January 11, 2017

Prefiled January 10, 2017

*A BILL to amend and reenact § 2.2-3705.7 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public access to library records of minors.*

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Patron—Pogge

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Referred to Committee on General Laws

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**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That § 2.2-3705.7 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 2.2-3705.7. Exclusions to application of chapter; records of specific public bodies and certain other limited exclusions.**

The following information contained in a public record is excluded from the mandatory disclosure provisions of this chapter but may be disclosed by the custodian in his discretion, except where such disclosure is prohibited by law. Redaction of information excluded under this section from a public record shall be conducted in accordance with § 2.2-3704.01.

1. State income, business, and estate tax returns, personal property tax returns, and confidential records held pursuant to § 58.1-3.

2. Working papers and correspondence of the Office of the Governor; the Lieutenant Governor; the Attorney General; the members of the General Assembly, the Division of Legislative Services, or the Clerks of the House of Delegates and the Senate of Virginia; the mayor or chief executive officer of any political subdivision of the Commonwealth; or the president or other chief executive officer of any public institution of higher education in Virginia. However, no information that is otherwise open to inspection under this chapter shall be deemed excluded by virtue of the fact that it has been attached to or incorporated within any working paper or correspondence. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to authorize the withholding of any resumes or applications submitted by persons who are appointed by the Governor pursuant to § 2.2-106 or 2.2-107.

As used in this subdivision:

"Members of the General Assembly" means each member of the Senate of Virginia and the House of Delegates and their legislative aides when working on behalf of such member.

"Office of the Governor" means the Governor; his chief of staff, counsel, director of policy, Cabinet Secretaries, and Assistant to the Governor for Intergovernmental Affairs and those individuals to whom the Governor has delegated his authority pursuant to § 2.2-104.

"Working papers" means those records prepared by or for an above-named public official for his personal or deliberative use.

3. Information contained in library records that can be used to identify (i) both (i) (a) any library patron who has borrowed material from a library and (ii) (b) the material such patron borrowed or (ii) any library patron under 18 years of age. For the purposes of clause (ii), access shall not be denied to the parent, including a noncustodial parent, or guardian of such library patron.

Going back to the bill's landing page, you'll also see its history (7): a new entry for every committee assignment and vote from the time it was introduced until the bill's final disposition, whether that is to pass and enact it or whether it is to defeat it at some point.

You can click on any highlighted entry to get further details, like who voted yes and who voted no (8).

Each bill's landing page will follow this format in the LIS system. There's no nuance here — you can't know what was said or why a bill seems stalled in committee — but it is extremely useful for tracking the overall progress of the session.

If you're interested in statistical work, you can go to the Committees page and click on the statistics for the House or Senate.

# 2017 SESSION

## LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES

Committee information includes membership, regularly scheduled meeting time and a linked list of bills and resolutions in committee.  
[View House or Senate committee statistics.](#)

### HOUSE COMMITTEES

<a href="#">Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources</a>
<a href="#">Appropriations</a>
<a href="#">Commerce and Labor</a>
<a href="#">Counties, Cities and Towns</a>
<a href="#">Courts of Justice</a>
<a href="#">Education</a>
<a href="#">Finance</a>
<a href="#">General Laws</a>
<a href="#">Health, Welfare and Institutions</a>
<a href="#">Militia, Police and Public Safety</a>
<a href="#">Privileges and Elections</a>
<a href="#">Rules</a>
<a href="#">Science and Technology</a>
<a href="#">Transportation</a>

### SENATE COMMITTEES

<a href="#">Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources</a>
<a href="#">Commerce and Labor</a>
<a href="#">Courts of Justice</a>
<a href="#">Education and Health</a>
<a href="#">Finance</a>
<a href="#">General Laws and Technology</a>
<a href="#">Local Government</a>
<a href="#">Privileges and Elections</a>
<a href="#">Rehabilitation and Social Services</a>
<a href="#">Rules</a>
<a href="#">Transportation</a>

And if you want to know how your legislator (or anyone else) has voted on particular matters (i.e., they're voting history), click on one of these links and enter the appropriate data in the various drop-down menus and buttons.

# 2017 SESSION

## MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Member information includes political party affiliation, district represented, office address and telephone, committee assignments, and a linked list of bills and resolutions sponsored. View legislation that counts toward the [House](#) member's or [Senate](#) member's bill limit. See how my [delegate](#) or [senator](#) voted on the floor, committee or subcommittee. [Who's My Legislator?](#)

### HOUSE MEMBERS

[Les R. Adams](#)

[Lashrecse D. Aird](#)

[David B. Albo](#)

[Richard L. Anderson](#)

[Terry L. Austin](#)

[Lamont Bagby](#)

[John J. Bell](#)

[Richard P. Bell](#)

[Robert B. Bell](#)

[Robert S. Bloxom, Jr.](#)

[Jeffrey M. Bourne](#)

[Jennifer B. Boysko](#)

[David L. Bulova](#)

[Kathy J. Byron](#)

[Jeffrey L. Campbell](#)

[Betsy B. Carr](#)

[Benjamin L. Cline](#)

[Mark L. Cole](#)

[Christopher E. Collins](#)

[M. Kirkland Cox](#)

[Glenn R. Davis](#)

[L. Mark Dudenhefer](#)

[James E. Edmunds, II](#)

[C. Matthew Fariss](#)

[Peter F. Farrell](#)

### SENATE MEMBERS

[George L. Barker](#)

[Richard H. Black](#)

[Charles W. Carrico, Sr.](#)

[A. Benton "Ben" Chafin](#)

[Amanda F. Chase](#)

[John A. Cosgrove, Jr.](#)

[Rosalyn R. Dance](#)

[R. Creigh Deeds](#)

[Bill R. DeSteph, Jr.](#)

[Siobhan S. Dunnavant](#)

[Adam P. Ebbin](#)

[John S. Edwards](#)

[Barbara A. Favola](#)

[Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.](#)

[Janet D. Howell](#)

[Lynwood W. Lewis, Jr.](#)

[Mamie E. Locke](#)

[L. Louise Lucas](#)

[David W. Marsden](#)

[T. Montgomery "Monty" Mason](#)

[Jennifer L. McClellan](#)

[Ryan T. McDougale](#)

[Jeremy S. McPike](#)

[Stephen D. Newman](#)

[Thomas K. Norment, Jr.](#)

You can check back often for updates on the bills you're interested, but you can also get updates from the system itself from the Lobbyist in a Box service. Sign up for free tracking of a limited number of bills. Or, sign up for a paid account and have the system track an unlimited number of bills for you.

Another site to keep in mind is [RichmondSunlight.com](http://RichmondSunlight.com). This is a free site that gathers LIS data and repackages it into a more interactive site. It allows for you to tag bills you're interested in, see who else is following those bills and provides comment sections for people to weigh in on why they think a bill is good or bad.

Though I've taken a pretty deep dive into the process right here, I've left out even more. The site takes getting used to, but once you feel comfortable with it, it is an amazing resource limited only by your own interests and time.