

How to Navigate Texas Legislature Online

The Texas Legislature Online is a great resource for looking up every bill that gets filed in the Texas Legislature. It is a trove of information beyond the bills too. You can find out where any bill is at in the legislative process, vote counts, official bill analyses, witness lists, and more. Since it is the “official” state database, it is the first to get updates on bill movement too, which makes it an invaluable resource to get familiarized with the closer the legislature gets to its firm deadlines (like the end of session).

This quick guide is meant to point out how/where to find relevant information for the bills you’re interested in tracking or reading.

Start Here: The Home Page

<https://capitol.texas.gov/>

The screenshot shows the Texas Legislature Online (TLO) home page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, My TLO, House, Senate, Legislation, Search, Committees, and Calendars. A search box is highlighted with a yellow circle, showing the current legislative session as "87(R) - 2021" and the search type as "Bill Number". The page also includes sections for Texas House and Texas Senate navigation, Access Mobile Version of TLO, Legislative Activity, Legislative Process, Redistricting, and Who Represents Me.

This looks like a lot, and you can find out a lot of information from all the links on the TLO home page, but if you’re searching for a specific bill, the quickest way to find it is the search tool. The things you want to make sure of before you enter a bill number are:

1. Make sure you’ve got the right legislative session. Right now (Winter/Spring 2021) we are in the 87th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. The shorthand TLO uses to search for bills filed this session is “87(R) - 2021.” If we go to a special session, there will be a separate search option for it, which will probably be called “87(I) - 2021.”
2. Make sure you choose “Bill Number” instead of “Word/Phrase.”

Search Results

If you found the bill via the search, it should look something like this:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=SB243>

Bill: SB 243 Legislative Session: 87(R) Council Document: 87R 1177 JXC-F Add to Bill Lis

Last Action: 03/03/2021 S Referred to Business & Commerce
Caption Version: Introduced
Caption Text: Relating to energy efficiency goals for electric utilities.
Author: Eckhardt
Cosponsor:
Subjects: Energy--Conservation (10317)
 Utilities--Electric (10831)
 PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION (V0023)
Senate Committee: [Business & Commerce](#)
Status: In committee

Actions: (descending date order)

Description	Comment	Date	Time	Journal	Page
S Referred to Business & Commerce		03/03/2021			164
S Read first time		03/03/2021			164
S Filed		12/14/2020			
S Received by the Secretary of the Senate		12/14/2020			

From this screen, you can see quick information about where the bill is in the legislative process under “Actions” and other basic information like who authored the bill and who co-sponsors the bill.

You can click on many of the links under Actions to see more information. This becomes important when you are trying to find out how a member voted in committee or on the Senate/House floor. The link will take you to the official record, which is a long pdf file of legislative action (amendments, votes to table, points of order, etc.). It should open the large pdf to the beginning of the action relevant to your bill. Sometimes this lasts several pages, so if you are looking for something specific, such as a vote count, you might want to use the finder tool.

Tabs

The tabs on the screen are fairly self explanatory and can be helpful to explore. However, the Text tab contains useful information besides the actual text of the bill.

Bill: SB 243 Legislative Session: 86(R) Author: Lozano

Version	Bill	Fiscal Note	Analysis	Witness List	Summary Cmte Act
Introduced					
House Committee Report					
Engrossed					
Senate Committee Report					
Senate Amendments Printing					
Enrolled					

Additional Documents: [HRO Bill Analysis](#) [Enrolled Bill Summary](#)

In this example from the 86th Regular Session, you can access the original version of the bill, but if the bill was substituted for a different version in committee (called a “committee substitute” and often referred to short-hand as “CSSB.... Or CSHB...”), here is where you can find the newer version.

Each bill is required to include a notification of a fiscal note, meaning if it costs the state money, this is noted in a separate document you can access here.

Each bill also gets an official analysis - intended to be a non-biased analysis of what the bill would do and its pros and cons.

Each bill that a committee hears also has a record of witnesses testifying “For”, “Against”, and “On.” This screen is where you can access that list as well. It can be a very valuable tool to identify stakeholders and power map.

MyTLO and other functions

TLO has many functions and uses that you may want to consider using, such as list tracking, saved searches, and setting up updates you can receive via email when a bill moves through the process. It’s up to you whether it makes sense to use these tools. The Sierra Club also uses two other bill tracking systems, called “Telicon” and “Quorum.” Quorum is what we use to display our priority bills on our website. Sometimes this list lags a little updating because it scrapes data from TLO, but it is timely. However, when deadlines approach, and action is taken on certain bills move quickly from stage to stage (sometimes within hours or minutes), and Quorum may not be updated right away. So it’s a good idea to familiarize yourself with TLO now so you know where to find out what happens when things move quickly.

Questions? Lost? Contact Matt Johnson at matt.johnson@sierraclub.org.