

Primer on Maine Law



Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library

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Compiled by the Reference Staff

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What is *the law*?

The law comes from several sources...

Constitution	A constitution establishes individual rights as well as the structure and authority of the government. For example, the Maine Constitution establishes that, “The supreme executive power of this State shall be vested in a Governor.”
Statutes	Statutes are the laws passed by the Legislature organized by subject. For example, Maine has many motor vehicle statutes. Statute 29-A MRS §2079 says, “Braking or acceleration may not be unnecessarily made so as to cause a harsh and objectionable noise.”
Regulations	Regulations are written by government agencies (in Maine, we call them rules). Regulations have the force of law because agencies get <i>rulemaking authority</i> from statutes. For example, the statutes say that to renew his license, a real estate appraiser must take continuing education classes. The rules, written by the Board of Real Estate Appraisers, specify how many hours and which classes are allowed.
Ordinances	If there’s no state or federal law on a particular subject (e.g. whether dogs are required to be on a leash), a town or city might pass its own law, or ordinance.
Court opinions, or <i>case law</i>	Written by judges, court opinions interpret the law (i.e. statutes, regulations, other court opinions, etc.) and decide how it applies to a particular situation when two parties disagree on what the law means. Some court decisions, called <i>precedential</i> , must be followed by other courts. These decisions make up <i>case law</i> .



Sometimes, more than one type of law *applies*, or is relevant, to a situation. For example, to figure out if a local official can hold more than one position or office, you might have to look at statutes, court cases, and town ordinances.

Constitution of the State of Maine

A constitution establishes individual rights as well as the structure and authority of the government.

About

The Maine Constitution provides law on a range of topics. Some sections are broad. For example, they give authority to the State's three branches of government. Some sections provide more specific guidance, such as the number of State Senators or the procedure for issuing State bonds.

Where can I find it?

Legislature's website:

<http://legislature.maine.gov/ros/LawsOfMaine/#Const>

Maine Revised Statutes Annotated (MRSA), Volume 1

The MRSA is the print version of Maine's Constitution and statutes. *Annotated* means that the publisher has added notes after each section of the Constitution. These notes include court cases that interpret the Constitution and a history of the changes to it. The MRSA is available at the Law Library or we can mail volumes to patrons to borrow.

Westlaw

The MRSA is available online (and is searchable) through a service called Westlaw. Patrons can use Westlaw at the Law Library, or we can send selections by e-mail.

Additional information

The Maine State Constitution by Marshall J. Tinkle (Call number: JK2825 .T46)

This book provides a section-by-section explanation of the Maine Constitution and highlights changes to each section.

Legislative History of Amendments to the State of Maine Constitution

<http://maine.gov/legis/lawlib/lldl/constitutionalamendments/>

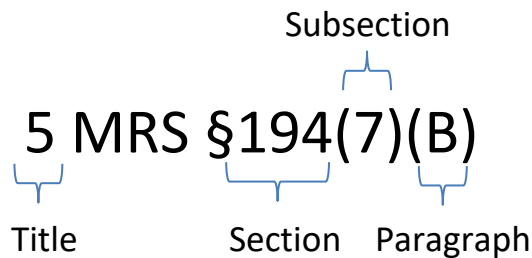
Session Laws and Statutes

Statutes are the laws passed by the Legislature organized by subject.

About

The Maine Revised Statutes (MRS) contains Maine's written law. The Legislature passes individual laws, or *session laws*, on many topics. The language in these laws is then organized by subject into the statutes. One session law passed by the Legislature might be distributed, or *allocated*, into one or more statutes. Likewise, each statute is affected by one or more session laws.

A citation to the MRS looks like this:



Where can I find it?

Legislature's website:

<http://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/>

Maine Revised Statutes Annotated (MRSA)

The MRSA is the print version of Maine's statutes. *Annotated* means that the publisher has added notes after each statute. These notes include court cases that interpret the statute and a history of the changes to it. The MRSA is available at the Law Library or we can mail volumes to patrons to borrow. The MRSA is the official version of the Maine statutes.

Westlaw

The MRSA is available online (and is searchable) through a service called Westlaw. Patrons can use Westlaw at the Law Library, or we can send selections by e-mail.

Legislation

Session laws are created through the legislative process.

About

Every year, the Maine Legislature considers 1,000+ proposals for legislation and it enacts hundreds of session laws. When researching the law, sometimes it is important to know the *legislative history* of a particular session law, or why it was enacted.

Where can I find it?

Maine Bill and Enacted Law Text Search (1985 to present)

This system provides the status of legislation currently being considered by the Legislature. It also contains the full text of session laws passed by the Legislature (1995 to present) as well as the full text of bills and amendments of legislation proposed in the past (1993 to present).

<https://legislature.maine.gov/mrs-search/billtext.html>

LawMaker (2003 to present)

This system provides the status of legislation currently being considered by the Legislature. It also provides the history of actions taken on bills from the past.

<http://legislature.maine.gov/LawMakerWeb/search.asp>

Law and Legislative Digital Library (LLDL)

The LLDL provides many resources for researching the history of legislation in Maine, including the full text of Maine session laws enacted since 1820 and pre-compiled legislative histories for all bills proposed since 1981.

<http://maine.gov/legis/lawlib/lldl/lldlhome.htm>

Additional Information

Path of Legislation in Maine

<http://legislature.maine.gov/general/path-of-legislation-in-maine-detailed/9285>

Compiling a Maine Legislative History

<http://legislature.maine.gov/9258/>

Regulations

Regulations are written by government agencies, but they have the force of law.

About

Maine's regulations are called the *Code of Maine Rules* (regulations may be often referred to as *rules*). The *Code of Maine Rules* (CMR) is arranged by numbers which identify the department, departmental unit, and chapter. For example, 01-015 CMR Ch. 1 represents Chapter 1 of the Maine Milk Commission, which is part of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

Where can I find it?

Maine Secretary of State website

<http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/rules.html>

Code of Maine Rules in print

Print updates to the *Code of Maine Rules* were discontinued by the publisher in March, 2019.

Westlaw

Maine regulations are available online (and searchable) through a service called Westlaw. Patrons can use Westlaw at the Law Library, or we can send selections by e-mail.

Additional information

Maine State Government Annual Report

Summarizes the administrative and financial structure and activities of Maine State agencies.

http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib/lldl/rpts/jk2835_b87a.html

Ordinances

An ordinance is a law enacted by a town or city.

About

Towns and cities may have their own *charter*, or founding legal document, and a code of ordinances. Ordinances usually deal with topics such as zoning, noise restrictions, animal control, etc.

Where can I find it?

Maine Local Ordinances LibGuide

The University of Maine School of Law maintains a Maine County Government, Town & City Ordinances and Registry of Deeds LibGuide. Click on a county from the left side of the screen to see a list of municipalities:
<https://lawguides.mainelaw.maine.edu/ordinances/about>

Contact the municipality directly

Contact the clerk of the municipality. Most municipalities maintain a website with contact information.

Maine Municipal Directory

Provides the names, addresses, telephone numbers and other vital information about local government officials throughout Maine's 486 municipalities. Book is for library use only. We can send selections by e-mail: <https://www.maine.gov/legis/lawlib/refemail.htm>

Court Opinions

Court opinions interpret the law and decide how it applies to a particular situation when two parties disagree on what the law means.

About

Maine has four kinds of courts: the Supreme Judicial Court, the Superior Court, the District Court, and the Probate Court. Each court handles different kinds of cases.

Where can I find it?

❖ Supreme Judicial Court

Judiciary's website (2017 to present)

<https://www.courts.maine.gov/courts/sjc/opinions.html>

Cleaves Law Library website (1997-2023)

<http://www.cleaves.org/slip.htm>

Westlaw (1820 to present)

The full text of all available cases can be searched using a service called Westlaw. Patrons can use Westlaw at the Law Library, or we can send you opinions by e-mail.

Maine Reporter (1966 to present)

Only the opinions of the Supreme Judicial Court are published in what is called a *reporter* (a *reporter* is a set of books that contains the official and *precedential* opinions of a court). The *Maine Reporter* is available at the Law Library or we can mail volumes to patrons to borrow.

Maine Reports (1820 to 1965)

The print reporter where Maine court opinions used to be published. *Maine Reports* is available at the Law Library or we can mail volumes to patrons to borrow.

Court Opinions (Cont'd)

❖ Superior Court

Garbrecht Law Library (2000 to present)

<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/library/collections/superior-court-decisions/>

Westlaw (2000 to present)

The full text of all available cases can be searched using Westlaw. Patrons can use Westlaw at the Law Library, or we can send you opinions by e-mail.

❖ District Court

Contact the court directly

http://www.courts.maine.gov/maine_courts/district/index.shtml

❖ Probate Court

Search Probate records

Search Probate Court dockets by county using various search criteria. Images are available on cases filed since 2008 in all counties. Some courts have scanned additional documents prior to 2008.

<https://www.maineprobate.net/search/>

Additional Information

Maine State Court Structure Chart

<https://cspbr.azurewebsites.net/>

Court Rules

Court Rules explain in detail the procedures you must follow for your case to be considered by the Courts.

About

Court rules are written by the Maine Courts and they have the force of law. They explain, for example, how much time someone has to file documents in a court case and how those documents should be formatted. There are several different kinds of court rules depending on what kind of court case you are involved in:

- Maine Rules of Civil Procedure
- Maine Rules of Unified Criminal Procedure
- Maine Rules of Evidence
- Maine Rules of Appellate Procedure
- Maine Rules of Probate Procedure
- Maine Rules of Small Claims Procedure

Where can I find it?

Judiciary's website

<https://www.courts.maine.gov/rules/index.html>

Maine Court Rules: State Edition (Tower Publishing)

The official published version of the Maine Court Rules is published by Tower Publishing. It is available in print at the Law Library, or we can lend you a copy through the mail.

West's Maine Rules of Court Annotated (Thomson Reuters)

Annotated means that the publisher has added notes after each rule. These notes include court cases that interpret the rules and a history of the changes to them. It is available in print at the Law Library, or we can lend you a copy through the mail.

Westlaw

The court rules are available online (and searchable) through a service called Westlaw. Patrons can use Westlaw at the Law Library, or we can send selections by e-mail.

Books about Maine Law

These books help explain Maine law on various subjects. Many are available for loan through the mail. This is not a complete list! Search [our catalog](#) for more topics and materials.

Coaches Manual by Drummond Woodsum & MacMahon (GV711 .C63 2016)

Littler on Maine Employment Law by Littler Mendelson, P.C. (KF3319.Z99 L5 2017)

Maine Administrative Procedure by John N. Ferdico (KF5402.Z99 M22)

Maine Appellate Practice by Donald G. Alexander (KF9050.Z99 M24)

Maine Attorney General's Consumer Law Guide by James A. McKenna and the Public Protection Unit (KF1610.Z99 M24)

http://www.maine.gov/ag/consumer/consumer_law_guide.shtml

Maine Civil Practice by Charles Harvey (vol. 2-3A) (KF8816.Z99 M2)

Maine Civil Remedies by Hon. Andrew M Horton and Peggy L. McGehee (KF9010.H6)

Maine Corporation Law and Practice by James B. Zimpritch (KF1384.Z99 M225)

Maine Family Law by Jon D. Levy (KF535.Z99 M21 2013)

Maine Human Resources Manual: A Guide to Maine and Federal Employment Laws and Regulations by Maine State Chamber of Commerce (KF3458.Z99 M224)

Maine Jury Instruction Manual by Donald G. Alexander (KF8984.Z99 M22)

Maine Law Enforcement Officer's Manual by John N. Ferdico (KF9620.Z99 M2)

Maine Real Estate Law and Practice by Casper F. Cowan (KF570.Z99 M212)

Maine School Law by Harry R. Pringle, Amy K. Tchao, Ann S. Chapman (eds.) (KF4119.Z99 M24)

The Maine State Constitution by Marshall J. Tinkle (JK2825 .T46 2013)

Books about Maine Law (Cont'd)

Maine Tort Law by Jack H. Simmons, Donald N. Zillman, David D. Gregory.
(KF1215.Z99 M245)

Maine workers' compensation law treatise by Zachary J. Smith
(KF3615.Z99 S68 2021)

Powers and duties of a governor: principles, laws, and lessons from Maine
by Derek P. Langhauser (JK2853.P6 L361 2024)

A Practical Guide to Discovery and Depositions in Maine by John P. Giffune et al.
(KF8900.Z99 G54)

A Practical Guide to Divorce in Maine by Heather T. Whiting (KF535.Z99 W55)

A Practical Guide to Employment Law in Maine by Patricia M. Dunn et al.
(KF3320.Z99 H24 2019)

A Practical Guide to Estate Planning in Maine by Timothy P. Benoit et al. (KF750.Z99 M226)

A Practical Guide to Evidence in Maine by Brita J. Forsberg et al. (KF8935.Z99 M28)

A Practical Guide to Land Use in Maine by Matthew D. Manahan (ed.) (KF5698.Z99 M36)

A Practical Guide to Probate in Maine by Miles C. Hunt (ed.) (KF765.Z99 M32 2020)

A Practical Guide to Residential Real Estate Transactions and Foreclosures in Maine
by Christopher E. Pazar (ed) (KF570.Z99 M25)

A Practical Guide to Superior Court Practice in Maine by Timothy J. Bryant et al.
(KF8736.Z99 M3)

Trial Handbook for Maine Lawyers by Thomas B. Merritt (KF8915.Z99 M23)



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ONLINE: <https://www.maine.gov/legis/lawlib/refemail.htm>