Tips for READING AND CITING Legislation

Look through all the tabs:
On Congress.gov or a state legislature site, you may have to click on several tabs to find all the information you need about the law or bill. Look for:

- Date of bill...what session of Congress/legislature was it introduced in?
- Full text of bill
- Actions already taken on it
- Current status of bill: Is it in a committee being discussed? Did it "die" in committee? Did it pass a vote in both chambers of Congress (House and Senate)? Has it been approved by the President or Governor? If it didn't pass and it's older than the current Congressional session, follow up and find out if it was amended an re-proposed in a later session. This page from the U.S. House of Representatives is a helpful reminder of how a bill becomes a law at the federal level).
- CBO analysis, OMB analysis or other cost information if given. What is this? Often, there is a separate tab or link for a Congressional Budget Office analysis or other estimate of a bill's potential cost. If none is provided, you can use Ctrl + F in the full text of the bill and look for words like "appropriate/appropriations," "grants," or "funds" to get the cost info you need for your paper.

Avoid:
- Legislation that is no longer relevant because it's been replaced by something else (ex: No Child Left Behind)
- Legislation that declares politicians' support for something, but doesn't actually do anything
- Legislation unrelated to your social issue.

Tips for Citing Legislation

It's a little tricky because the standard citation format for legal citations (in college and professionally) is usually Harvard's *Bluebook* rather than the *MLA Handbook*. However, you can use the link below from the Modern Language Association about citing legislation. Just click on the type of source you found and follow the example given:

https://style.mla.org/documenting-legal-works/

An example from the above link of a federal law:
United States, Congress, House. Improving Broadband Access for Veterans Act of 2016.

Congress.gov, www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/6394/text. 114th

Congress, 2nd session, House Resolution 6394, passed 6 Dec. 2016.

...and of a state bill:

Wisconsin State, Legislature. Senate Bill 5. *Wisconsin State Legislature*, 20 Jan. 2017,

docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2017/related/proposals/sb5.

Note that these elements that might be different from what you're used to:

- Begins with name of government and relevant institution within it (ex: House, Senate)
- Name of law is NOT in quotation marks or italics, but name of container (*Congress.gov)* is in italics
- URL is in the middle for federal legislation! Weird-looking, right? Think of it as all the publication info, ending with the URL, and then follow-up information about the passage of the law itself.

Parentheticals always need to match the first thing in the Works Cited entry, which is why we have a hanging indent (so that part sticks out).

However, if you have multiple federal bills or laws, this will result in several parentheticals that are all: (United States).

To differentiate the two sources, start the same way, but then add a comma and another piece of information from later in the citation (*MLA Handbook* p. 55).

For example, for these two (made-up) sources:

United States, Congress, House. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals...

United States, Congress, House. DREAM Act...

You would do:

(United States, Deferred)

(United States, DREAM)

Add page numbers after that if there are any.