

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COLLECTIONS POLICY STATEMENTS

Law

(Class K, “LAW”, J1-J14, JX1-JX1304, JX2000-JX9999)

Contents

- I. Scope
- II. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement
- III. Research Strengths
- IV. Collecting Policy
- V. Best Editions and Preferred Formats
- VI. Acquisition Sources
- VII. Collecting Levels

I. Scope

Serving as the *de facto* law library of the United States, the Law Library of Congress acquires legal information in the publishing format designated as official by each issuing body, and retains the best archival copy available. The Law Library serves two purposes: first and foremost, non-U.S. and U.S. legal specialists/attorneys on staff develop “law practice libraries” for their countries/international organizations. This will enable them in the future to provide thorough responses to increasingly complex legal questions from Congress, the courts, and executive branch agencies. Questions may require information from 273 existing jurisdictions and 28 international/regional organizations. To support this work, approximately sixty percent of the collection is in vernacular languages, requiring multi-lingual staff to develop, curate and use the collection. Secondly, the collection supports onsite and remote library patrons. The Law Library collects legal and legislative materials in paper and digital formats, and actively produces digital surrogates. The Copyright Best Edition statement is followed by the Law Library to guide what format should be acquired, however it cannot override the Law Library’s need to acquire the format considered official by the issuing body.

Core materials covered by this statement comprise the collections in Class K, and the following classes no longer maintained by the Library: Class J1-J14 (official gazettes), Class JX1-JX1304 and Class JX2000-JX9999 (International Law), and the “LAW” shelfmark.¹ Important legal resources are also found in special collections in manuscripts, maps, rare books, and the general collections, housed in various custodial divisions of the Library.

¹ A long-term classification project is underway that will convert all materials classed in the obsolete LAW shelving system to the modern, K class. At the current rate, it is estimated that this effort will be completed around 2027.

II. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement

As the nation's de facto national library, the Library of Congress strives to build an expansive, yet selective, collection that records the creativity of the United States and is reflective of the nation's diversity and complexity. The Library's mandate is to have collections that are inclusive and representative of a diversity of creators and ideas. A priority includes acquiring material of underrepresented perspectives and voices in the Library's collections to ensure diverse authorship, points of view, cultural identities, and other historical or cultural factors. The Library also seeks to build a research collection that comprises a globally representative sample of international materials that are diverse in voice and perspective, relative to their places of origin, further supporting the Library's mission to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for Congress and future generations.

Diverse collecting is mentioned within many of the Library's Collections Policy Statements. In addition, the Library has adopted several specific collection policies in an effort to ensure it is building an inclusive and representative collection. For more information, see the Library's Collections Policy Statements on [Ethnic Materials](#), [LGBTQIA+ Studies](#), [Women's and Gender Studies](#), [Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials](#), and [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges](#).

III. Research Strengths

The Law Library of Congress is the largest law library in the world. The law collection currently consists of more than one million titles containing over 2.9 million volumes, and over 3 million micro-format items. About 65,000 of these volumes are housed in the Law Library Rare Book collection. The Law Library has amassed a comprehensive collection of American legal material, a superior collection of legal works from all nations of the world and international/regional organizations for law in general, comparative law, religious law, and nations' laws. Comprehensive geographically, the collection also spans all periods of law, from the most ancient to the most contemporary. All systems of law—common, civil, customary, and religious—are represented, as are all topics within the field of law.

The Law Library is a repository for most publications of the US Congress and one of ten institutions with a premier collection of the Supreme Court Records and Briefs of the United States. The collections provide important support for the legal research that the Law Library and the Congressional Research Service provide to the Congress, and that the Law Library provides to the Supreme Court, Executive Branch agencies, and the nation.

IV. Collecting Policy

The Law Library comprehensively acquires and retains for its permanent collection publications in the following categories, many of which are official publications:

Legislative Sources

- A. Official Gazettes
- B. Constitutions and proceedings of constitutional conventions, including published draft versions and reports of debates and committees on draft versions
- C. Documents published by the United States Congress, including its debates, reports, documents, hearings, prints, acts and all versions of all introduced bills
- D. Treaties
- E. Legal and legislative documents published by legislative, executive and judicial branches of the United States and non-U.S. governments
- F. Legal and legislative documents published by legislative, executive and judicial branches of U.S. states and major non-U.S. sub-national governments
- G. Codes, compilations, revisions or other consolidations of laws, including draft versions
- H. Proceedings and reports of code and law revision commissions
- I. Chronological publications of laws and session laws

Administrative Sources

- A. Chronological publications of administrative and ministerial rules and regulations
- B. Codes, compilations, revisions or other consolidations of administrative and ministerial rules and regulations, including draft versions

Judicial Sources

- A. Records and Briefs of the United States Supreme Court and Courts of Appeals
- B. Supreme Court of the United Kingdom appeal records and cases of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council of Great Britain
- C. Court decisions and reports, and the decisions and rulings of administrative courts having the effect of judicial decisions
- D. Digests and indexes of the decisions and reports of courts, and the decisions and rulings of administrative courts and agencies
- E. Citators and noters-up of the decisions and reports of courts and the decisions and rulings of administrative courts and agencies
- F. Court rules and rules of practice and procedure of judicial and administrative courts and agencies

Other Sources

- A. Indexes to laws, and rules and regulations
- B. Legal dictionaries and encyclopedias and dictionaries of words and phrases which define the language of a country by authoritative legal sources
- C. Legislative histories of the United States at the Federal level, including source materials
- D. Publications of the American Bar Association

The Law Library acquires and retains for its permanent collections the following types of legal material

on a selective but as comprehensive basis as possible:

- A. Separate issues and compilations of laws and rules and regulations on special subjects
- B. Legal periodicals and their indexes
- C. Loose leaf titles
- D. Commentaries on or annotated versions of specific laws, codes, and rules and regulations;
- E. Treatises and other monographic expositions of legal subjects or issues
- F. Commemorative collections of essays (Festschriften) and other collections of essays on specific legal topics
- G. Legislative histories, including source materials, for the United States below the Federal level and for non-U.S. jurisdictions
- H. Translations of constitutions, laws, codes, rules and regulations, treaties, treatises, texts and commentaries into English
- I. Translations of Anglo-American constitutions, laws, codes, rules and regulations, outstanding treatises, texts, and commentaries into languages other than English, to meet Congressional demands
- J. Publications of bar associations and legal societies of the United States other than the American Bar Association, those of non-U.S. countries, and international bar associations and legal societies
- K. Directories of the legal profession
- L. Legal newspapers of major United States cities
- M. Manuscripts in or relating to the field of law
- N. Blogs and web sites relating to the field of law
- O. Rare legal materials which complement existing collections assigned to the Law Library Rare Book Room

The Law Library of Congress does not actively seek to acquire or permanently retain the following types of publications in the field of law:

- A. Extracts, separates, or unrevised reprints or re-impressions of books, reprints and extracts from journals, and reprints of specific acts
- B. Law school newsletters, newspapers, announcements, and materials for examinations
- C. Law school theses, dissertations and theses on legal subjects
- D. Current acquisition lists of other libraries
- E. Press releases
- F. House organs
- G. Legislative bills of U.S. states and non-U.S. countries
- H. Pamphlet materials
- I. Textbooks and other publications below the college level
- J. Law school casebooks
- K. Law school catalogs and yearbooks.

This policy does not preclude the acquisition of materials falling outside the above policies, for the permanent collection or for temporary use, when such materials contain information of particular concern to Congress and to the United States Government. That includes information not found elsewhere in the Library of Congress' collections, or that must be acquired to facilitate reference or research use.

The Law Library collects the above material in all available formats. Digital databases are acquired for ease of research, but at this point in time, databases are not acquired in place of paper copies unless designated as official by the issuing authority or jurisdiction.

The following Collections Policy Statements also provide guidance in the collection of law material for the permanent collection: [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges Collections Policy Statement](#); [Government Publications–Non-U.S. Collections Policy Statement](#); [Government Publications–United States Collections Policy Statement](#); and [International Organizations Collections Policy Statement](#).

V. Best Editions and Preferred Formats

For guidance regarding best editions for material acquired via the Copyright Office, see: <http://copyright.gov/circs/circ07b.pdf>.

For guidance regarding recommended formats for material acquired via all other means; e.g., purchase, exchange, gift and transfer, see: <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs>.

For information regarding electronic resources, open digital content, web archiving, and data sets, see the following Supplementary Guidelines: <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/electronicresources.pdf>, <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/opencontent.pdf>, <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/webarchive.pdf>, and <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/datasets.pdf>.

VI. Acquisition Sources

Whenever possible the Library attempts to acquire materials through non-purchase means, such as copyright, exchange, gift, or the Cataloging in Publication program. The Library of Congress collections are heavily dependent upon materials received through the copyright deposit provisions of U.S. copyright law ([17 USC section 407](#) & [17 USC section 408](#)). For copyright demand, the U.S. regulations allow for the Library to receive analog and some digital materials. When items are offered in both formats the Library's default is normally the Best Edition print version, unless the publisher has arranged a special relief agreement with the Copyright Office. For materials not available to the Library through copyright deposit, or other non-purchase means, the Library acquires materials through purchase. Purchase is used predominately for non-U.S. publications that are not widely available within the United States. The Library utilizes an array of traditional methods of library acquisition (firm orders, subscriptions, and approval plans) with vendors located in different areas of the world. In addition, the

Library uses its six Overseas Operations Offices to broaden its acquisitions opportunities outside the United States.

More detail on means of adding materials to the law collection is below:

- A. Copyright receipts. This has been the primary means by which the Law Library has developed the depth and breadth of its collection of American legal material. To a lesser degree, legal material from Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe is also received via the Copyright Office.
- B. Cataloging-In-Publication (CIP). The CIP program has also been an important source for US-published materials, especially from minor legal publishers and university presses.
- C. Transfer and By-Law. The Law Library receives two copies of Congressional documents and other legal materials published by the United State Government Publishing Office (GPO). Many U.S. state governments deposit officially produced legal materials with the Library of Congress, including state session laws, court reports, and attorney general opinions. Some states require the deposit of one copy of official legal materials that are produced by commercial publishers when licensed by the state.
- D. Purchase. The Law Library relies heavily on direct purchase for legal materials, especially for reference titles, non-U.S. legal materials, titles with a high patron demand, electronic resources and databases, and micro format archival material.
- E. Exchange. The Library maintains exchange arrangements with major institutions in the United States and non-U.S. countries. Exchange receipts have been declining as some countries discontinue these programs or move to digital publishing only.
- F. Gift. The Law Library receives individual monograph titles as gifts from authors. Gifts are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

The six acquisition sources listed above work best in the world of print and micro format publications. They work less well in the area of electronic resources. The major challenge facing the Law Library in the future will be costs to acquire a comprehensive set of electronic resources produced in the United States, available by subscription or license. Costs for subscription resources may be prohibitive. And current policies and procedures of the Copyright Office do not permit the Library to demand the deposit of these materials. The Copyright Office has begun to demand deposit of some digital titles and continues to pursue special relief agreements with publishers for Library access to titles through the publishers' websites. The Library has subscribed to or licensed many electronic resources and databases, including legal resources that are heavily used by Law Library staffers and users. However, the current acquisition budget is not adequate to keep up with the increase in subscription-based electronic resources produced worldwide.

The second major challenge facing the Law Library is the question of authenticity of online legal sources. As countries transition to digital publishing, the official status of online legal publications is not always clear. Some countries have statutorily declared digital versions of legal materials to be official sources

while others have not. The same is true for some U.S. states as well. To the extent possible, the Law Library will continue to acquire legal materials from sources deemed official by the issuing body or agency. The Law Library will also follow Library guidance and best practices that are developed to acquire, preserve, and provide access to born-digital materials.

The Law Library has been active in creating and curating several web archive collections to acquire and preserve born-digital legal materials. Collections available to the public include the United States Congressional Web Archive (member websites from the House of Representatives and Senate from the 107th – 112th Congresses); Legal Blawgs (comprising around 200 legal blogs and web sites that meet Library standards); Federal Courts Web Archive (which harvests the websites of the US Supreme Court, federal district courts, and specialized federal courts); and the International Courts and Tribunals web archive collection (which hosts information about the most important international tribunals created since World War II).

VII. Collecting Levels

Meeting the Library’s Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement (see Section II) and the collecting levels outlined below requires continual evaluation of the publishing landscape, sources of expression, current events, and socio-cultural trends to thus maintain effective collecting policies and acquisitions methods. Changes in publishing or in the creation of materials covered by this policy statement may necessitate collecting efforts not explicitly referenced here. Such efforts will be handled on a case-by-case basis while the Library evaluates the need for policy statement updates.

For explanation of the Collecting Levels used by the Library, see <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/cpc.html>.

The Law Library aspires to collect at a Level 5 for as many areas of its collections as possible. For secondary material from the United States, the Law Library collects on a selective basis. For non-U.S. jurisdictions the Law Library aims to collect as comprehensively as possible.

| LC Classification | Subject | Collection Levels– Primary Material | Collection Levels– Secondary Material |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| K | Law General | N/A ² | 4 |
| KB | Law - Religious | 5 | 4 |

² As a rule, there are no primary sources of “Law General.”

| LC Classification | Subject | Collection Levels– Primary Material | Collection Levels– Secondary Material |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| KD | Law - United Kingdom and Ireland | 5 | 5 |
| KE | Law - Canada | 5 | 5 |
| KF | Law - United States - Federal | 5 | 5 |
| KFA-KFW | Law - United States - States | 5 | 4 |
| KFX | Law - United States - Cities | 3 | 2 |
| KG-KH | Law - Americas and Latin America | 5 | 5 |
| KIA-KIX | Law of Indigenous Peoples in the Americas | 5 | 5 |
| KJ-KKZ | Law - Europe | 5 | 5 |
| KL-KPW | Law - Asia and Eurasia | 5 | 5 |
| KQ-KTZ | Law - Africa | 5 | 5 |
| KU-KWX | Law - the Pacific Area and Antarctica | 5 | 5 |
| KZ, JX | Law of Nations (International Law) | 5 | 5 |
| KZA | Law of the Sea | 5 | 4 |
| KZD | Law of Space | 5 | 4 |

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