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Legal Research on the Internet: Places to Start

by Michelle Nicolet

The quantity of legal resources available on the World Wide Web continues to grow. Practitioners can retrieve—in addition to case law—statutes, legislative information, administrative agency rules and guidance, news, and other useful information inexpensively and efficiently on the Internet. However, as the Web expands, finding relevant information becomes even more difficult. Fortunately for legal services advocates, several Web sites offer users searching capability and even direct links to useful sources of information.

A good place to start is the recently revised and expanded Web site of the National Clearinghouse for Legal Services (NCLS). A new feature at the site, Research Links of Interest to Poverty Law Advocates, contains links to over 250 Web sites, including case law libraries, administrative agencies, public policy organizations, and other legal services organizations. Links are organized according to the substantive legal areas familiar to readers of CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW (e.g., Attorneys/Legal Services, Consumer, Employment, Housing, Welfare). Each substantive heading includes at least one, and frequently several, links to Web sites that contain useful information in that topical area. For example, the Welfare links page includes links to the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, the American Public Welfare Association, the Electronic Policy Network (a consortium of public policy organizations), the Welfare Information Network, and many state human services agencies. Similarly the Housing links page contains links to the Department of Housing and Urban Development as well as the National Coalition for the Homeless, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, and the Office of Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention, among others. Clearinghouse staff intend to continue to build these lists of links as new resources become available on the Internet.

The revised NCLS Web site also features an expanded Case Developments section. To view the Case Developments, from the NCLS home page click on Items of Interest from Our Library and then Case Developments. Abstracts of cases recently sent to the Clearinghouse library by field program attorneys will be posted regularly here. In addition, where available, the full text of documents submitted by the field attorneys in electronic format will be attached to those abstracts. For example, in *Boatman v. Miller*, a case challenging Michigan's failure to provide transportation assistance to Medicaid recipients, plaintiffs' motion to dismiss, motion for summary judgment, and reply brief to defendant's motion for summary judgment are available for downloading. Decisions in several relevant federal and state supreme

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Useful Research Sites

Readers can find links to these sites at the National Clearinghouse for Legal Services Web site, <http://www.nclsplp.org/links/research.htm>.

National Clearinghouse for Legal Services	http://www.nclsplp.org
LawCrawler	http://www.lawcrawler.com
FindLaw	http://www.findlaw.com/
American Law Sources On-Line	http://www.lawsources.com/also/
World Wide Web Virtual Law Library	http://www.law.indiana.edu/law/v-lib/lawindex.html
Villanova Center for Information Law and Policy	http://www.law.vill.edu/
Legal Information Institute	http://www.law.cornell.edu/
Hieros Gamos*	http://www.hg.org/
FedWorld	http://www.fedworld.gov/
GPO Access	http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aaces001.html
U.S. House of Representatives Law Library	http://law.house.gov/
Law Journal Extra	http://www.ljx.com/indexhigh.html

* For more information on Hieros Gamos see Susan Sebok, *Hieros Gamos Harmonizes Law-Related Sites on the Internet*, 30 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 740 (Nov. 1996).

court cases, such as the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Arizonans for Official English v. Arizona*, challenging the state's English-only law, will be made accessible in the Case Developments section of the NCLS Web site.

Though not specifically tailored to the information needs of poverty law advocates, several other Web sites featuring legal resources may be of interest. LawCrawler's powerful search engine allows users to keyword-search for legal information worldwide. Alternatively, users can choose to restrict their searches to federal law, California law, or other states' law. FindLaw, an index of legal resources linked to LawCrawler, lists Internet resources by subject area and type (law schools, cases and codes, federal government resources, state law resources, etc.) Within each subject area, FindLaw lists primary materials and government resources, publications (journals, newsletters, and articles), mailing lists and usenet news groups, and relevant Web sites. FindLaw is also searchable using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT, or NEAR).

American Law Sources On-Line (ALSO) bills itself as a "comprehensive, uniform, and useful compilation of links to all on-line sources of American law that are available without charge." ALSO's links are organized according to jurisdiction (federal and individual states) and type. Each page of links is divided into law sources (cases, statutes, etc.), commentary on the law (law reviews, etc.), and practice aids (court information, official forms, etc.). For information that is available from more than one source (e.g., Supreme Court opinions), each source is listed with commentary on the breadth and searchability of the information offered.

The World Wide Web Virtual Law Library, developed by the World Wide Web Consortium and maintained by the University of Indiana School of Law, includes links to legal information organized by type and by topic. The Virtual Law Library features lists of law schools and libraries, law firms, U.S. government servers, state government servers, law journals on the Web, and publishers and vendors. Its list of legal organizations, foundations, and nonprofit entities is especially useful. The Virtual Law Library also features links to several other search tools and comprehensive legal information sites.

The Villanova Center for Information Law and Policy features several "Web locators" for legal information on the Internet. The Federal Web Locator indexes U.S. government Web sites. The Federal and State Court Locators link users to federal and state judiciaries. The State Web Locator is a good resource for finding state government information on the Web.

The Legal Information Institute (LII), a service of Cornell Law School, offers recent and historic Supreme Court decisions; hypertext versions of the U.S. Code, Constitution, Federal Rules of Evidence and Civil Procedure; and recent opinions of the New York Court of Appeals. LII's menu of Legal Material Organized by Type or Source is especially useful as a launch pad to most judicial opinions and administrative rules available on the Internet, as well as state and federal agencies with Web sites. LII's site is also host to the *libulletin-ny*, an electronic current awareness service through which student editors analyze significant decisions of the New York Court of Appeals, as well as the *Cornell Law Review*.

Hieros Gamos (HG) contains links to over 15,000 law-related sites. HG I contains information on and links to over 6,000 legal organizations worldwide, including bar associations, law schools, law publishers, and law firms. HG II features links to information and Web sites in over 70 primary practice areas. HG III's data bases list meetings, publications, law firms, experts, court reporters, alternative dispute resolution professionals, private investigators, and process servers who have submitted information to Hieros Gamos. Each of Hieros Gamos's three subsections is fully searchable.

Although government information servers abound, a few especially useful ones merit mention. FedWorld, a service of the National Technical Information Service, is intended as a "one-stop shop" for federal government information. FedWorld enables users to search over two dozen data bases summarizing over 10,000 government documents. FedWorld's Government Information Locator Service, a virtual card catalog of government documents, allows users to search for public information by agency. FedWorld also enables users to search abstracts of and order recent government reports and studies.

GPO Access offers free access to documents published by the Government Printing Office, including General Accounting Office (GAO) reports and the *Federal Register*. Users can perform keyword searches across more than 70 government data bases, including the *Federal Register*, the text of the federal budget, congressional bills, the Congressional Record, GAO reports, public laws from the 104th Congress, Supreme Court decisions, and the U.S. Code.

The U.S. House of Representatives Law Library is a convenient place to find searchable versions of the U.S. Code and the Code of Federal Regulations. In addition, the House Law Library contains links to over 8,900 other Internet law resources, listed by subject and jurisdiction.

Finally, a good source of law-related news is Law Journal Extra (LJX). Billed as the "largest commercial Web site for lawyers," LJX is maintained by the New York Law Publishing Co., publishers of the *National Law Journal* and the *New York Law Journal*. Updated daily, LJX features legal headlines, an extensive list of legal resources on line, and stories culled from the *National Law Journal* and the *New York Law Journal* organized by practice area. LJX's Law Technology Center is an especially good source of information on software, hardware, and lawyers' use of computer technology to enhance their practice.

Conclusion

Although the breadth and variety of legal resources on the Internet can make finding information difficult, advocates can make use of the law-oriented search engines and sites mentioned above to locate relevant information. Readers are especially encouraged to check the NCLS Web site often for recent case law of interest and to use NCLS's links as a launch pad to other related information on the Internet.