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U.S. Law and Legal Research

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U. S. Law and Legal Research

Pat Court

Starr Foundation Workshop

October 8, 2007

Excellent Overview



- “A Guide to the U. S. Federal Legal System: Web-based Public Accessible Sources”
- By Gretchen Feltes, at NYU Law Library
- http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/United_States.htm

Three Branches of Government

- Legislative – Congress
- Judicial – Supreme Court, Circuit Courts of Appeal, District Courts (trials)
- Executive – President, Agencies



U.S. Legislation



- U.S. Code is the subject compilation of all federal laws currently in effect, arranged by 50 titles (broad subjects)

Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1201 et seq. (2000).

- Statutes at Large is the chronological compilation of Public Laws as they are enacted

Pub. L. 101-336, 104 Stat. 327 (1990).

Official v. Unofficial Codes



- U.S. Code is the official code that comes from the U.S. government
- Most researchers actually work in the unofficial codes, which use the same numbering and add valuable extras (citations to cases, journals, history, etc.):
 - U.S. Code Annotated, from West
 - U.S. Code Service, from Lexis

Federal Courts



Supreme Court – highest

Official Reporter: US; Unofficial: SCt, LEd 2d

Circuit Courts of Appeal – intermediate

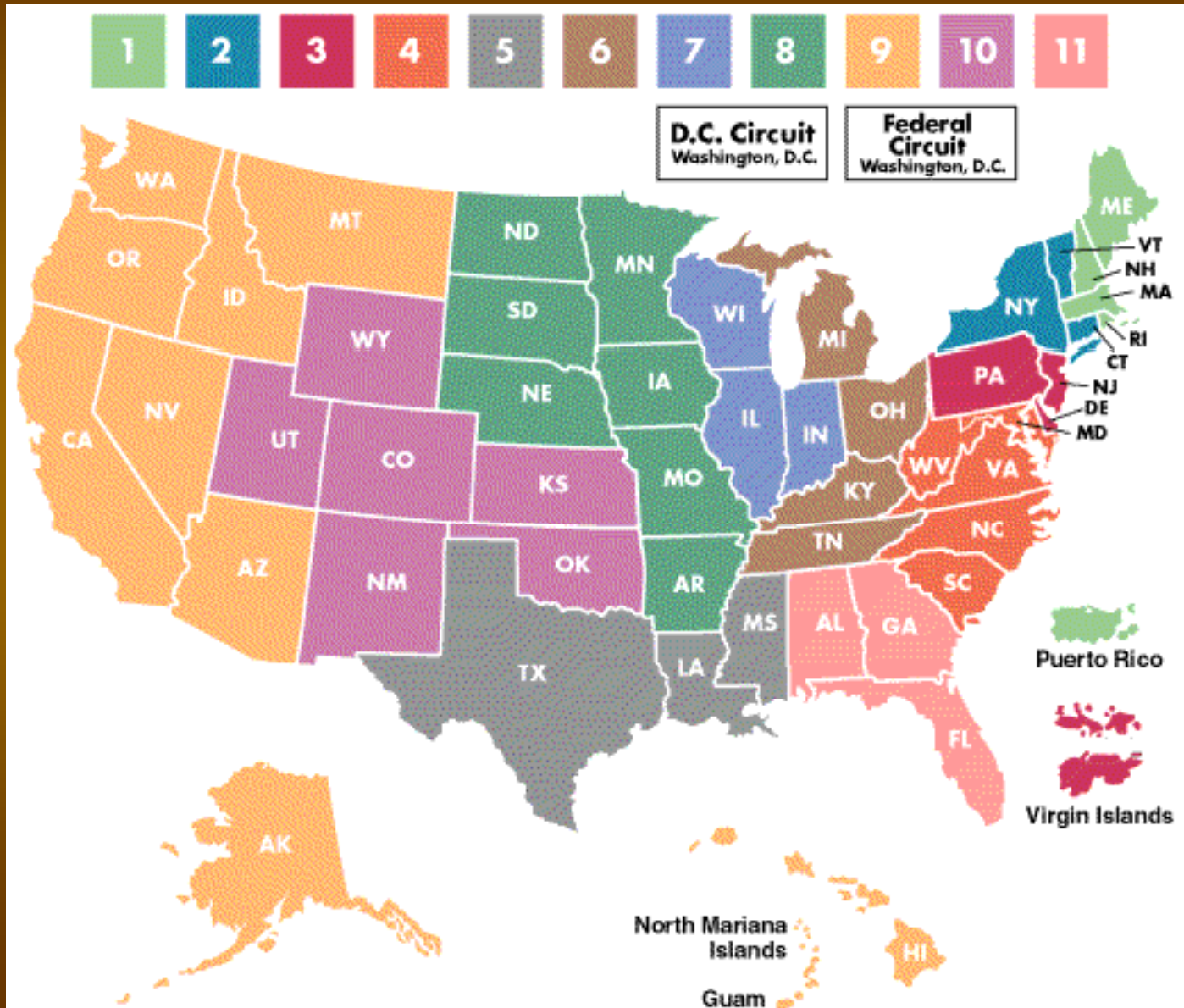
1-11 + DC + Federal

Federal Reporter: F3d

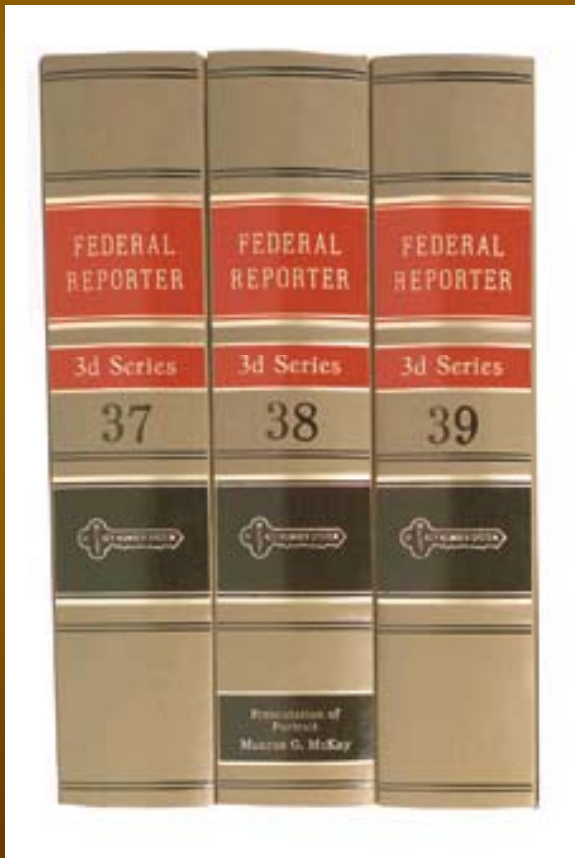
District Courts – trials

Federal Supplement: F. Supp. 2d

FEDERAL CIRCUIT COURTS

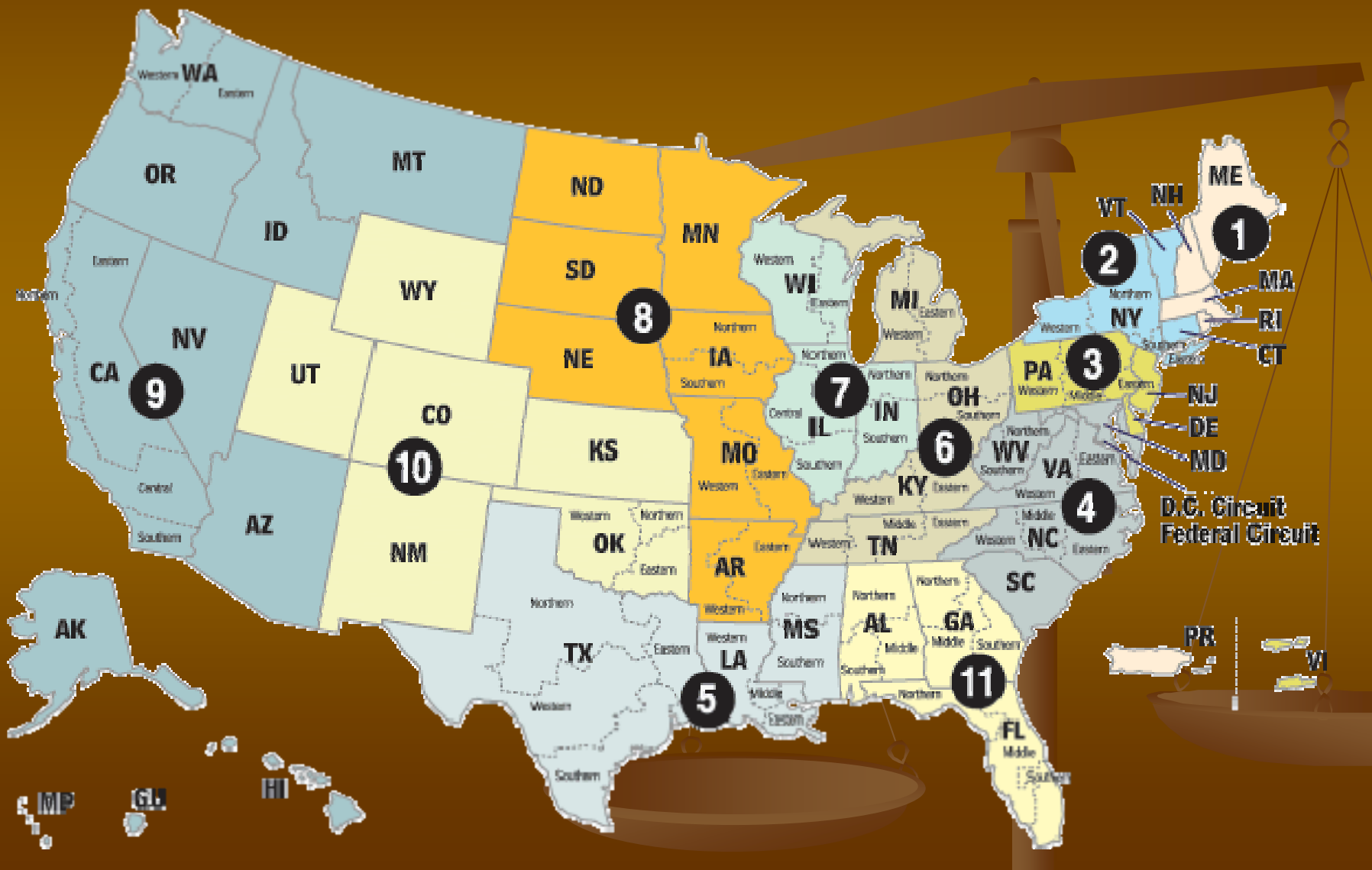


Circuit Court Citation in Federal Reporter



- Jirau-Bernal v. Agrait,
37 F.3d 1 (1st Cir. 1994)
- Volume 37 of the Federal Reporter, third series. Case starts on page 1
- Decided by First Circuit in 1994

Federal Circuits and District Courts



Free Web Sites for U.S. Cases



Legal Information Institute at Cornell is the world leader in providing U.S., states, foreign and international cases, codes, regulations, and Wex legal encyclopedia
<http://www.law.cornell.edu/>

Justia provides Internet users with free case law, codes, regulations, legal articles and legal blogs
<http://www.justia.com/>

Supreme Court of the United States is the official web site for the US Supreme Court, but “unofficial” opinions
<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>

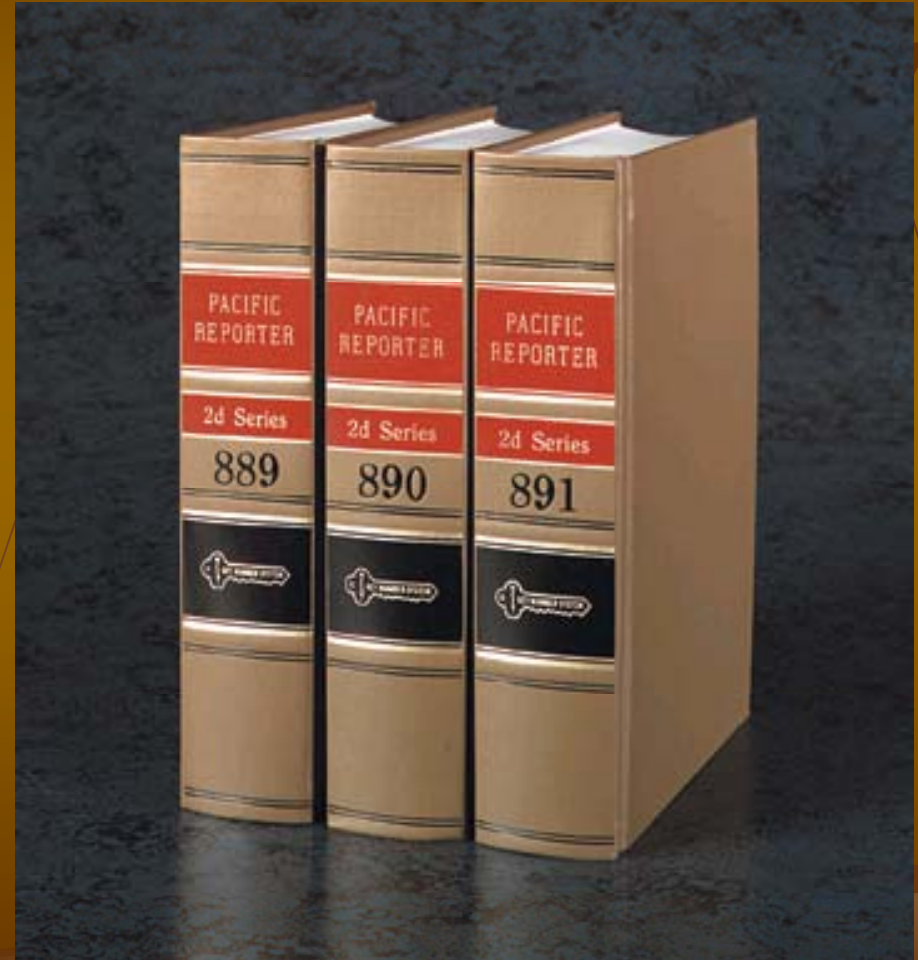
Cases from 50 States

Regional Reporters

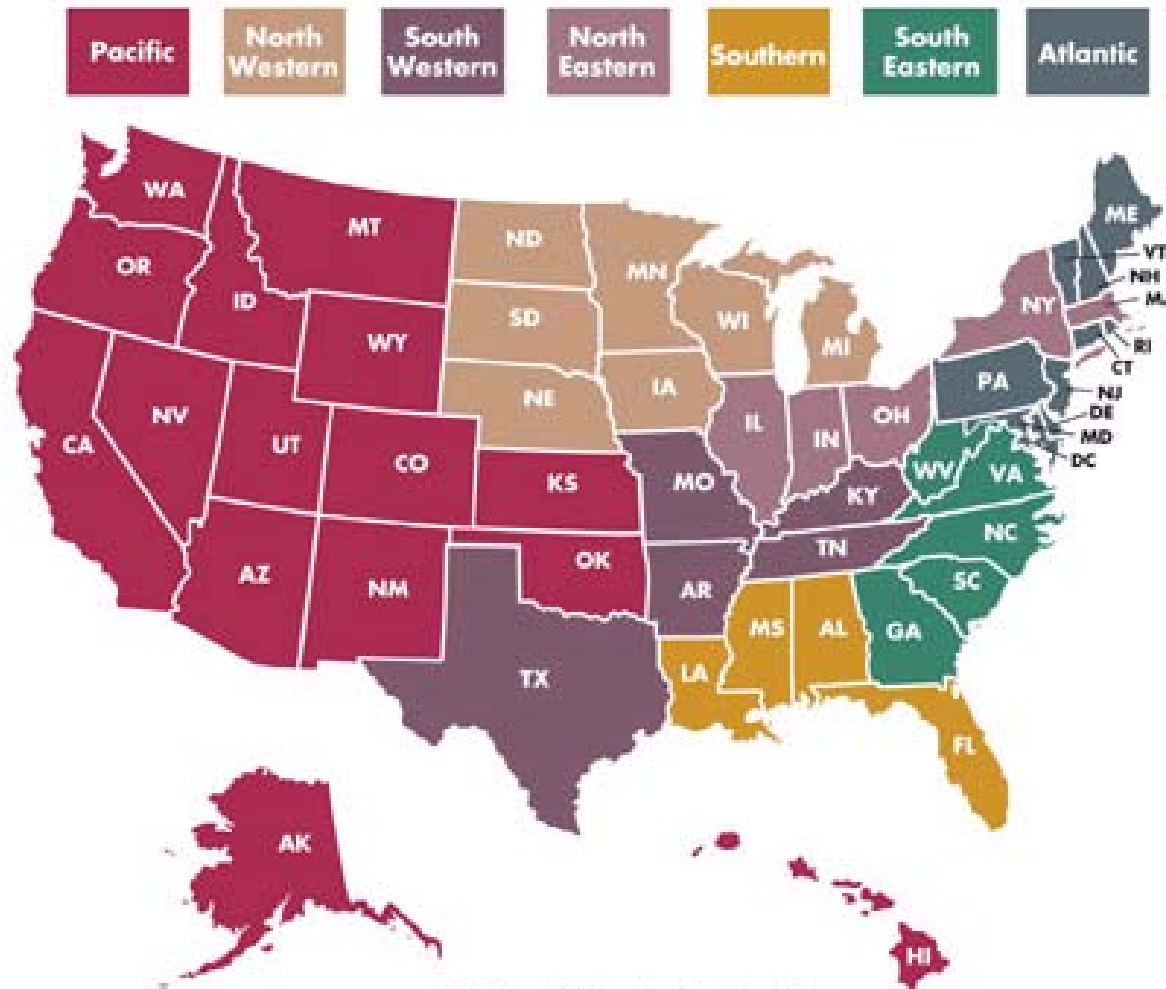
Appellate cases from all states, divided in 7 regions: Atlantic, North East, North West, Pacific, South East, South West, and Southern

Official Reports

Some states publish their own cases



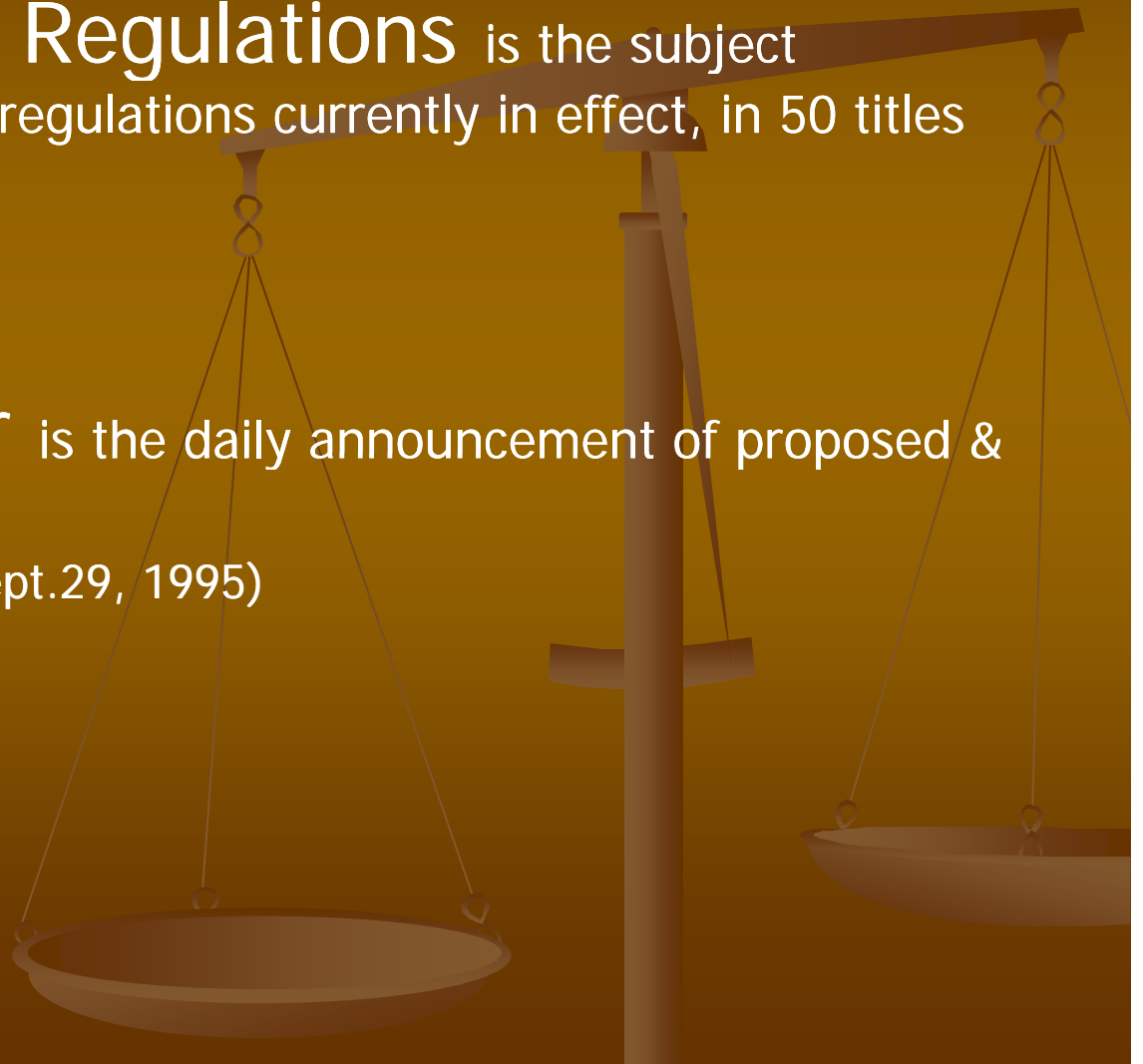
Regional Reporters (State Cases)




National Reporter System Map
showing the states included in each reporter

Regulations

- **Code of Federal Regulations** is the subject compilation of all federal regulations currently in effect, in 50 titles (broad subjects)
 - 16 C.F.R. § 444 (2006)
- **Federal Register** is the daily announcement of proposed & final regulations
 - 60 Fed. Reg. 50,379 (Sept.29, 1995)



Regulations and Agencies on the Web



GPO Access is the government's official web site for regulations, legislation, etc.

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

Federal Agencies Directory from Louisiana State University

<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/gov/fedgov.html>

Fee Based Databases

- Westlaw
- Lexis
- PACER – Public
Access to Court
Electronic Records



Westlaw



- A leading legal information service, providing laws, cases, regulations, articles, news, corporate information, and more
- Integrates information requested with related documents
- Expensive for law firms, low rates for law schools, and priced by the piece for the public
- <http://westlaw.com>

Lexis

- A leading legal information service, providing laws, cases, regulations, articles, news, corporate information, and more
- Integrates information requested with related documents
- Expensive for law firms, low rates for law schools, and priced by the piece for the public
- <http://lexis.com>



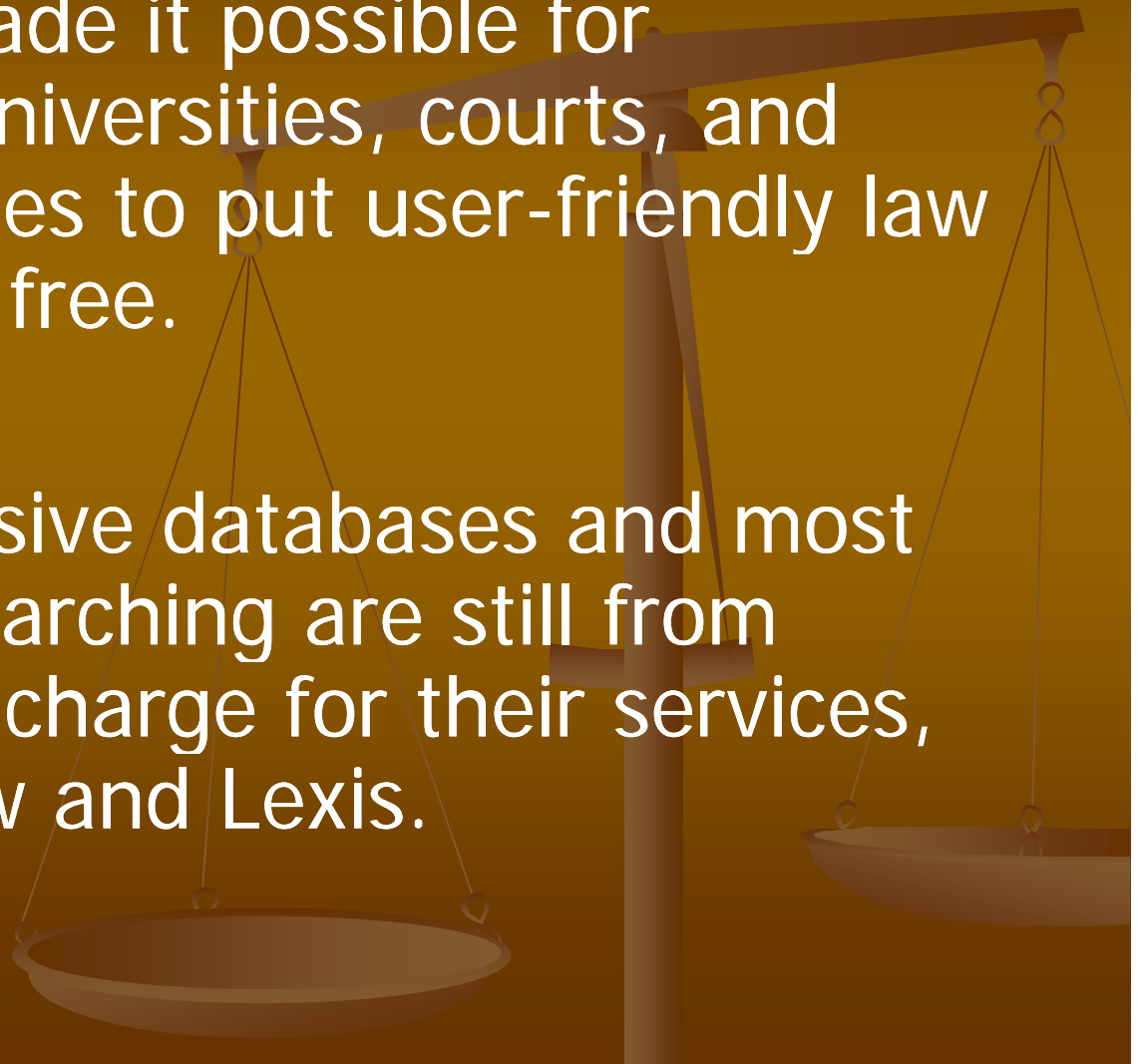
PACER

- Public Access to Court Electronic Records
- Dockets, transcripts, complaints, motions, and more for federal courts
- 8 cents per page
- <http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/>



U.S. Law Online

- The web has made it possible for governments, universities, courts, and private companies to put user-friendly law on the web, for free.
- The most extensive databases and most sophisticated searching are still from companies that charge for their services, such as Westlaw and Lexis.





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Workshop web page at
[http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/Who
WeAre/Partners/Starr/Presentations.cfm](http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/WhoWeAre/Partners/Starr/Presentations.cfm)

