

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
1977 SESSION

CHAPTER 406
HOUSE BILL 5

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH PROCEDURES FOR SENTENCING IN CAPITAL CASES AND
TO FIX THE PUNISHMENT FOR MURDER.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

Section 1. G.S. 14-17, as the same appears in the 1975 Cumulative Supplement to the 1969 Replacement Volume 1B of the General Statutes, is hereby amended and rewritten to read as follows:

"§ 14-17. Murder in the first and second degree defined; punishment. — A murder which shall be perpetrated by means of poison, lying in wait, imprisonment, starving, torture, or by any other kind of willful, deliberate, and premeditated killing, or which shall be committed in the perpetration or attempted perpetration of any arson, rape, robbery, kidnapping, burglary, or other felony committed or attempted with the use of a deadly weapon, shall be deemed to be murder in the first degree, and any person who commits such murder shall be punished with death or imprisonment in the State's prison for life as the court shall determine pursuant to G.S. 15A-2000. All other kinds of murder shall be deemed murder in the second degree, and any person who commits such murder shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of not less than two years nor more than life imprisonment in the State's prison."

Sec. 2. Chapter 15A of the General Statutes is hereby amended by inserting at the end thereof a new Article 100 entitled "Capital Punishment" to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 100.

"Capital Punishment.

"§ 15A-2000. Sentence of death or life imprisonment for capital felonies; further proceedings to determine sentence. — (a) Separate proceedings on issue of penalty.

- (1) Upon conviction or adjudication of guilt of a defendant of a capital felony, the court shall conduct a separate sentencing proceeding to determine whether the defendant should be sentenced to death or life imprisonment. A capital felony is one which may be punishable by death.
- (2) The proceeding shall be conducted by the trial judge before the trial jury as soon as practicable after the guilty verdict is returned. If prior to the time that the trial jury begins its deliberations on the issue of penalty, any juror dies, becomes incapacitated or disqualified, or is discharged for any reason, an alternate juror shall become a part of the jury and serve in all respects as those selected on the regular trial panel. An alternate juror shall become a part of the jury in the order in which he was selected. If the trial jury is unable to reconvene for a hearing on the issue of penalty after having determined the guilt of the accused, the trial judge shall impanel a new jury to determine the issue of the punishment. If the defendant pleads guilty, the sentencing proceeding shall be conducted before a jury impaneled for that purpose. A jury selected for the purpose of determining punishment in a capital case shall be selected in the same manner as juries are selected for the trial of capital cases.

- (3) In the proceeding there shall not be any requirement to resubmit evidence presented during the guilt determination phase of the case, unless a new jury is impaneled, but all such evidence is competent for the jury's consideration in passing on punishment. Evidence may be presented as to any matter that the court deems relevant to sentence, and may include matters relating to any of the aggravating or mitigating circumstances enumerated in subsections (e) and (f). Any evidence which the court deems to have probative value may be received.
- (4) The State and the defendant or his counsel shall be permitted to present argument for or against sentence of death. The defendant or defendant's counsel shall have the right to the last argument.

(b) Sentence recommendation by the jury. Instructions determined by the trial judge to be warranted by the evidence shall be given by the court in its charge to the jury prior to its deliberation in determining sentence. In all cases in which the death penalty may be authorized, the judge shall include in his instructions to the jury that it must consider any aggravating circumstance or circumstances or mitigating circumstance or circumstances from the lists provided in subsections (e) and (f) which may be supported by the evidence, and shall furnish to the jury a written list of issues relating to such aggravating or mitigating circumstance or circumstances.

After hearing the evidence, argument of counsel, and instructions of the court, the jury shall deliberate and render a sentence recommendation to the court, based upon the following matters:

- (1) whether any sufficient aggravating circumstance or circumstances as enumerated in subsection (e) exist;
- (2) whether any sufficient mitigating circumstance or circumstances as enumerated in subsection (f), which outweigh the aggravating circumstance or circumstances found, exist; and
- (3) based on these considerations, whether the defendant should be sentenced to death or to imprisonment in the State's prison for life.

The sentence recommendation must be agreed upon by a unanimous vote of the 12 jurors. Upon delivery of the sentence recommendation by the foreman of the jury, the jury shall be individually polled to establish whether each juror concurs and agrees to the sentence recommendation returned.

If the jury cannot, within a reasonable time, unanimously agree to its sentence recommendation, the judge shall impose a sentence of life imprisonment; provided, however, that the judge shall in no instance impose the death penalty when the jury cannot agree unanimously to its sentence recommendation.

(c) Findings in support of sentence of death. When the jury recommends a sentence of death, the foreman of the jury shall sign a writing on behalf of the jury which writing shall show:

- (1) The statutory aggravating circumstance or circumstances which the jury finds beyond a reasonable doubt; and
- (2) That the statutory aggravating circumstance or circumstances found by the jury are sufficiently substantial to call for the imposition of the death penalty; and,
- (3) That the mitigating circumstance or circumstances are insufficient to outweigh the aggravating circumstance or circumstances found.

(d) Review of judgment and sentence.

- (1) The judgment of conviction and sentence of death shall be subject to automatic review by the Supreme Court of North Carolina pursuant to procedures established by the Rules of Appellate Procedure. In its review,

the Supreme Court shall consider the punishment imposed as well as any errors assigned on appeal.

- (2) The sentence of death shall be overturned and a sentence of life imprisonment imposed in lieu thereof by the Supreme Court upon a finding that the record does not support the jury's findings of any aggravating circumstance or circumstances upon which the sentencing court based its sentence of death, or upon a finding that the sentence of death was imposed under the influence of passion, prejudice, or any other arbitrary factor, or upon a finding that the sentence of death is excessive or disproportionate to the penalty imposed in similar cases, considering both the crime and the defendant. The Supreme Court may suspend consideration of death penalty cases until such time as the court determines it is prepared to make the comparisons required under the provisions of this section.
- (3) If the sentence of death and the judgment of the trial court are reversed on appeal for error in the post-verdict sentencing proceeding, the Supreme Court shall order that a new sentencing hearing be conducted in conformity with the procedures of this Article.

(e) Aggravating circumstances. Aggravating circumstances which may be considered shall be limited to the following:

- (1) The capital felony was committed by a person lawfully incarcerated.
- (2) The defendant had been previously convicted of another capital felony.
- (3) The defendant had been previously convicted of a felony involving the use or threat of violence to the person.
- (4) The capital felony was committed for the purpose of avoiding or preventing a lawful arrest or effecting an escape from custody.
- (5) The capital felony was committed while the defendant was engaged, or was an aider or abettor, in the commission of, or an attempt to commit, or flight after committing or attempting to commit, any robbery, rape, arson, burglary, kidnapping, or aircraft piracy or the unlawful throwing, placing, or discharging of a destructive device or bomb.
- (6) The capital felony was committed for pecuniary gain.
- (7) The capital felony was committed to disrupt or hinder the lawful exercise of any governmental function or the enforcement of laws.
- (8) The capital felony was committed against a law enforcement officer, employee of the Department of Correction, jailer, fireman, judge or justice, former judge or justice, prosecutor or former prosecutor, juror or former juror, or witness or former witness against the defendant, while engaged in the performance of his official duties or because of the exercise of his official duty.
- (9) The capital felony was especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel.
- (10) The defendant knowingly created a great risk of death to more than one person by means of a weapon or device which would normally be hazardous to the lives of more than one person.

(f) Mitigating circumstances. Mitigating circumstances which may be considered shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- (1) The defendant has no significant history of prior criminal activity.
- (2) The capital felony was committed while the defendant was under the influence of mental or emotional disturbance.
- (3) The victim was a voluntary participant in the defendant's homicidal conduct or consented to the homicidal act.

- (4) The defendant was an accomplice in or accessory to the capital felony committed by another person and his participation was relatively minor.
- (5) The defendant acted under duress or under the domination of another person.
- (6) The capacity of the defendant to appreciate the criminality of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of law was impaired.
- (7) The age of the defendant at the time of the crime.
- (8) The defendant aided in the apprehension of another capital felon or testified truthfully on behalf of the prosecution in another prosecution of a felony.
- (9) Any other circumstance arising from the evidence which the jury deems to have mitigating value.

"§ 15A-2001. Capital offenses; plea of guilty. — Any person who has been indicted for an offense punishable by death may enter a plea of guilty at any time after his indictment, and the judge of the superior court having jurisdiction may sentence such person to life imprisonment or to death pursuant to the procedures of G.S. 15A-2000. Before sentencing the defendant, the presiding judge shall impanel a jury for the limited purpose of hearing evidence and determining a sentence recommendation as to the appropriate sentence pursuant to G.S. 15A-2000. The jury's sentence recommendation in cases where the defendant pleads guilty shall be determined under the same procedure of G.S. 15A-2000 applicable to defendants who have been tried and found guilty by a jury.

"§ 15A-2002. Capital offenses; jury verdict and sentence. — If the recommendation of the jury is that the defendant be sentenced to death, the judge shall impose a sentence of death in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 15, Article 19 of the General Statutes. If the recommendation of the jury is that the defendant be imprisoned for life in the State's prison, the judge shall impose a sentence of imprisonment for life in the State's prison.

"§ 15A-2003. Disability of trial judge. — In the event that the trial judge shall become disabled or unable to conduct the sentencing proceeding provided in this Article, the Chief Justice shall designate a judge to conduct such proceeding."

Sec. 3. G.S. 9-18 as the same appears in the 1969 Replacement Volume 1B of the General Statutes is hereby amended by rewriting the first sentence to read as follows:

"Whenever the presiding judge deems it appropriate, one or more alternate jurors may be selected in the same manner as the regular trial panel of jurors in the case, but after the regular jury has been duly impaneled; provided, however, that in all criminal actions in which one or more defendants is to be tried for a capital offense, or enter a plea of guilty to a capital offense, the presiding judge shall provide for the selection of at least two alternate jurors, or more as he deems appropriate."

Sec. 4. G.S. 9-18 as the same appears in the 1969 Replacement Volume 1B of the General Statutes, is hereby further amended by rewriting the sentence which begins with the word "An" on line 10 thereof to read as follows:

"An alternate juror shall receive the same compensation as other jurors and, except as hereinafter provided, shall be discharged upon the final submission of the case to the jury; provided, however, that no alternate juror in a capital case shall be discharged until the trial jury begins its deliberations on the issue of penalty."

Sec. 5. G.S. 9-18 as the same appears in the 1969 Replacement Volume 1B of the General Statutes, is hereby further amended by adding a new paragraph thereto to read as follows:

"In capital cases the alternate jurors shall be retained during the deliberations of the jury on the issue of guilt or innocence under such restrictions, regulations and instructions as the presiding judge shall direct. In case of sequestration of a jury during deliberations in a capital case, alternates shall be sequestered in the same manner as is the trial jury, but such alternates shall also be sequestered from the trial jury. In no event in the trial of any issue in a criminal case shall more than 12 jurors participate in the jury's deliberations."

Sec. 6. In the event that it is determined by the Supreme Court of North Carolina or by the Supreme Court of the United States that a sentence of death may not be constitutionally imposed for a capital offense for which the death penalty is provided by this act, the punishment for that offense shall be imprisonment in the State's prison for life.

Sec. 7. If any provisions of this act or the application thereof to any person or circumstances are held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of the act which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

Sec. 8. The provisions of this act shall apply to murders committed on or after the effective date of this act.

Sec. 9. This act shall become effective on June 1, 1977.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified, this the 19th day of May, 1977.