

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
1977 SESSION

CHAPTER 819  
SENATE BILL 539

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE CIVIL ABATEMENT OF NUISANCES INCLUDING  
OBSCENE MATTER.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**Section 1.** G.S. 19-1(a) of Article 1, Chapter 19, as the same appears in Volume 1C (1975) of the North Carolina General Statutes is rewritten to read as follows:

"§ 19-1(a). **What are nuisances under this Chapter.** — The erection, establishment, continuance, maintenance, use, ownership or leasing of any building or place for the purpose of assignation, prostitution, gambling, illegal possession or sale of intoxicating liquors, illegal possession or sale of narcotic drugs as defined in the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, or illegal possession or sale of obscene or lewd matter, as defined in this Chapter, shall constitute a nuisance;"

**Sec. 2.** G.S. 19-1(c) of Article 1, Chapter 19, as the same appears in Volume 1C (1975) of the North Carolina General Statutes is amended by inserting the words "or vehicle" immediately after the second comma on the first line thereof and by inserting a comma immediately following the word "vehicle".

**Sec. 3.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the North Carolina General Statutes is hereby amended by adding the following sections designated as G.S. 19-1.1, G.S. 19-1.2, G.S. 19-1.3, G.S. 19-1.4, and G.S. 19-1.5, immediately following G.S. 19-1 and immediately preceding G.S. 19-2.

"§ 19-1.1. **Definitions.** — As used in this Chapter relating to illegal possession or sale of obscene matter or to the other conduct prohibited in G.S. 19-1(a), the following definitions shall apply:

- (a) 'Knowledge' or 'knowledge of such nuisance' means having knowledge of the contents and character of the patently offensive sexual conduct which appears in the lewd matter, or knowledge of the acts of lewdness, assignation, gambling, the illegal possession or sale of intoxicating liquor, the illegal possession or sale of narcotic drugs as defined in the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, or prostitution which occur on the premises.
- (b) 'Lewd matter' is synonymous with 'obscene matter' and means any matter:
  - (1) which the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find, when considered as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; and
  - (2) which depicts patently offensive representations of:
    - a. ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated;
    - b. masturbation, excretory functions, or lewd exhibition of the genitals or genital area;
    - c. masochism or sadism; or
    - d. sexual acts with a child or animal.

Nothing herein contained is intended to include or proscribe any writing or written material, nor to include or proscribe any matter which, when

- considered as a whole, and in the context in which it is used, possesses serious literary, artistic, political, educational, or scientific value.
- (c) 'Lewdness' is synonymous with obscenity and shall mean the act of selling, exhibiting or possessing for sale or exhibition lewd matter.
  - (d) 'Matter' means a motion picture film or a publication or both.
  - (e) 'Motion picture film' shall include any:
    - (1) film or plate negative;
    - (2) film or plate positive;
    - (3) film designed to be projected on a screen for exhibition;
    - (4) films, glass slides or transparencies, either in negative or positive form, designed for exhibition by projection on a screen;
    - (5) video tape or any other medium used to electronically reproduce images on a screen.
  - (f) 'Person' means any individual, partnership, firm, association, corporation, or other legal entity.
  - (g) 'Place' includes, but is not limited to, any building, structure or places, or any separate part or portion thereof, whether permanent or not, or the ground itself, but excluding a private dwelling place not used for a profit.
  - (h) 'Publication' shall include any book, magazine, pamphlet, illustration, photograph, picture, sound recording, or a motion picture film which is offered for sale or exhibited in a coin-operated machine.
  - (i) 'Sale' means a passing of title or right of possession from a seller to a buyer for valuable consideration, and shall include, but is not limited to, any lease or rental arrangement or other transaction wherein or whereby any valuable consideration is received for the use of, or transfer or possession of, lewd matter.

**"§ 19-1.2. Types of nuisances.** — The following are declared to be nuisances wherein obscene or lewd matter or other conduct prohibited in G.S. 19-1(a) is involved:

- (a) any and every place in the State where lewd films are publicly exhibited as a predominant and regular course of business, or possessed for the purpose of such exhibition;
- (b) any and every place in the State where a lewd film is publicly and repeatedly exhibited, or possessed for the purpose of such exhibition;
- (c) any and every lewd film which is publicly exhibited, or possessed for such purpose at a place which is a nuisance under this Article;
- (d) any and every place of business in the State in which lewd publications constitute a principal or substantial part of the stock in trade;
- (e) any and every lewd publication possessed at a place which is a nuisance under this Article;
- (f) every place which, as a regular course of business, is used for the purposes of lewdness, assignation, gambling, the illegal possession or sale of intoxicating liquor, the illegal possession or sale of narcotic drugs as defined in the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, or prostitution, and every such place in or upon which acts of lewdness, assignation, gambling, the illegal possession or sale of intoxicating liquor, the illegal possession or sale of narcotic drugs as defined in the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, or prostitution, are held or occur.

**"§ 19-1.3. Personal property as a nuisance, knowledge of nuisance.** — The following are also declared to be nuisances, as personal property used in conducting and maintaining a nuisance under this Chapter:

- (a) all moneys paid as admission price to the exhibition of any lewd film found to be a nuisance;
- (b) all valuable consideration received for the sale of any lewd publication which is found to be a nuisance;
- (c) all money or other valuable consideration received or used in gambling, prostitution, the illegal sale of intoxicating liquors or the illegal sale of substances proscribed under the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, as well as the furniture and movable contents of a place used in connection with such prohibited conduct.

From and after service of a copy of the notice of hearing of the application for a preliminary injunction, provided for in G.S. 19-2.4 upon the place, or its manager, or acting manager, or person then in charge, all such parties are deemed to have knowledge of the contents of the restraining order and the use of the place occurring thereafter. Where the circumstantial proof warrants a determination that a person had knowledge of the nuisance prior to such service of process, the court may make such finding.

**"§ 19-1.4. Liability of successive owners for continuing nuisance.** — After notice of a temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, or permanent injunction, every successive owner of property who neglects to abate a continuing nuisance upon, or in the use of such property, created by a former owner, is liable therefor in the same manner as the one who first created it.

**"§ 19-1.5. Abatement does not preclude action.** — The abatement of a nuisance does not prejudice the right of any person to recover damages for its past existence."

**Sec. 4.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the North Carolina General Statutes is further amended by striking in its entirety the present G.S. 19-2 and inserting in lieu thereof the following sections:

**"§ 19-2.1. Action for abatement, injunction.** — Wherever a nuisance is kept, maintained, or exists, as defined in this Article, the attorney general, district attorney, or any private citizen of the county may maintain a civil action in the name of the State of North Carolina to abate a nuisance under this Chapter, perpetually to enjoin all persons from maintaining the same, and to enjoin the use of any structure or thing adjudged to be a nuisance under this Chapter; provided, however, that no private citizen may maintain such action where the alleged nuisance involves the illegal possession or sale of obscene or lewd matter.

If an action is instituted by a private person, the complainant shall execute a bond prior to the issuance of a restraining order or a temporary injunction, with good and sufficient surety to be approved by the court or clerk thereof, in the sum of not less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000), to secure to the party enjoined the damages he may sustain if such action is wrongfully brought, not prosecuted to final judgment, or is dismissed, or is not maintained, or if it is finally decided that the temporary restraining order or preliminary injunction ought not to have been granted. The party enjoined shall have recourse against said bond for all damages suffered, including damages to his property, person, or character and including reasonable attorney's fees incurred by him in making defense to said action. No bond shall be required of the prosecuting attorney or the attorney general, and no action shall be maintained against the public official for his official action.

**"§ 19-2.2. Pleadings; jurisdiction; venue; application for preliminary injunction.** — The action, provided for in this Chapter, shall be brought in the superior court of the county in which the property is located. Such action shall be commenced by the filing of a verified complaint alleging the facts constituting the nuisance. After the filing of said complaint, application for a preliminary injunction may be made to the court in which the action is filed which court shall grant a hearing within 10 days after the filing of said application.

**"§ 19-2.3. Temporary order restraining removal of personal property from premises; service, punishment.** — Where such application for a preliminary injunction is made, the court

may, on application of the complainant showing good cause, issue an ex parte temporary restraining order in accordance with G.S. 1A-1, Rule 65(b), preserving the status quo and restraining the defendant and all other persons from removing or in any manner interfering with any evidence specifically described, or in any manner removing or interfering with the personal property and contents of the place where such nuisance is alleged to exist, until the decision of the court granting or refusing such preliminary injunction and until further order of the court thereon. Nothing herein shall be interpreted to allow the prior restraint of the distribution of any matter or the sale of the stock in trade, but an inventory and full accounting of all business transactions involving alleged obscene or lewd matter thereafter shall be required.

Any person, firm, or corporation enjoined pursuant to this section may file with the court a motion to dissolve any temporary restraining order. Such a motion shall be heard within 24 hours of the time a copy of the motion is served on the complaining party, or on the next day the superior courts are open in the district, whichever is later. At such hearing the complaining party shall have the burden of showing why the restraining order should be continued.

In the event a temporary restraining order is issued, it may be served in accordance with the provisions of G.S. 1A-1, Rule 4, or may be served by handing to and leaving a copy of such order with any person in charge of such place or residing therein, or by posting a copy thereof in a conspicuous place at or upon one or more of the principal doors or entrances to such place, or by such service under said Rule 4, delivery and posting. The officer serving such temporary restraining order shall forthwith make and return into court an inventory of the personal property and contents situated in and used in conducting or maintaining such nuisance.

Any violation of such temporary restraining order is a contempt of court, and where such order is posted, mutilation or removal thereof, while the same remains in force, is a contempt of court, provided such posted order contains therein a notice to that effect.

**"§ 19-2.4. Notice of hearing on preliminary injunction; consolidation.** — A copy of the complaint, together with a notice of the time and place of the hearing of the application for a preliminary injunction, shall be served upon the defendant at least five days before such hearing. The place may also be served by posting such papers in the same manner as is provided for in G.S. 19-2.3 in the case of a temporary restraining order. If the hearing is then continued at the instance of any defendant, the temporary restraining order may be continued as a matter of course until the hearing.

Before or after the commencement of the hearing of an application for a preliminary injunction, the court, on application of either of the parties or on its own motion, may order the trial of the action on the merits to be advanced and consolidated with the hearing on the application for the preliminary injunction; provided, however, the defendant shall be entitled to a jury trial if requested.

**"§ 19-2.5. Hearing on the preliminary injunction; issuance.** — If upon hearing, the allegations of the complaint are sustained to the satisfaction of the court, the court shall issue a preliminary injunction restraining the defendant and any other person from continuing the nuisance and effectually enjoining its use thereafter for the purpose of conducting any such nuisance."

**Sec. 5.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the North Carolina General Statutes is further amended by rewriting G.S. 19-3 thereof as follows:

**"§ 19-3. Priority of action; evidence.** — (a) The action provided for in this Chapter shall be set down for trial at the first term of the court and shall have precedence over all other cases except crimes, election contests, or injunctions.

(b) In such action, an admission or finding of guilt of any person under the criminal laws against lewdness, assignation, prostitution, gambling, the illegal possession or sale of intoxicating liquors, or the illegal possession or sale of substances proscribed by the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, at any such place, is admissible for the purpose of proving the existence of said nuisance, and is evidence of such nuisance and of knowledge of, and of

acquiescence and participation therein, on the part of the person charged with maintaining said nuisance.

(c) At all hearings upon the merits, evidence of the general reputation of the building or place constituting the alleged nuisance, of the inmates thereof, and of those resorting thereto, is admissible for the purpose of proving the existence of such nuisance."

**Sec. 6.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the General Statutes is further amended by rewriting G.S. 19-5 thereof as follows:

**"§ 19-5. Content of final judgment and order.** — If the existence of a nuisance is admitted or established in an action as provided for in this Chapter an order of abatement shall be entered as a part of the judgment in the case, which judgment and order shall perpetually enjoin the defendant and any other person from further maintaining the nuisance at the place complained of, and the defendant from maintaining such nuisance elsewhere within the jurisdiction of this State. Lewd matter, illegal intoxicating liquors, gambling paraphernalia, or substances proscribed under the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act shall be destroyed and not be sold.

Such order may also require the effectual closing of the place against its use thereafter for the purpose of conducting any such nuisance.

The provisions of this Article, relating to the closing of a place with respect to obscene or lewd matter, shall not apply in any order of the court to any theatre or motion picture establishment which does not, in the regular, predominant, and ordinary course of its business, show or demonstrate lewd films or motion pictures, as defined in this Article, but any such establishment may be permanently enjoined from showing such film judicially determined to be obscene hereunder and such film or motion picture shall be destroyed and all proceeds and moneys received therefrom, after the issuance of a preliminary injunction, forfeited."

**Sec. 7.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the General Statutes is further amended by rewriting G.S. 19-6 thereof as follows:

**"§ 19-6. Civil penalty; forfeiture; accounting; lien as to expenses of abatement; invalidation of lease.** — Lewd matter is contraband, and there are no property rights therein. All personal property, including all money and other considerations, declared to be a nuisance under the provisions of G.S. 19-1.3 and other sections of this Article, are subject to forfeiture to the local government and are recoverable as damages in the county wherein such matter is sold, exhibited or otherwise used. Such property including moneys may be traced to and shall be recoverable from persons who, under G.S. 19-2.4, have knowledge of the nuisance at the time such moneys are received by them.

Upon judgment against the defendant or defendants in legal proceedings brought pursuant to this Article, an accounting shall be made by such defendant or defendants of all moneys received by them which have been declared to be a nuisance under this Article. An amount equal to the sum of all moneys estimated to have been taken in as gross income from such unlawful commercial activity shall be forfeited to the General Funds of the city and county governments wherein such activity took place, to be shared equally, as a forfeiture of the fruits of an unlawful enterprise, and as partial restitution for damages done to the public welfare; provided, however, that no provision of this Article shall authorize the recovery of any monies or gross income received from the sale of any book, magazine, or exhibition of any motion picture prior to the issuance of a preliminary injunction. Where the action is brought pursuant to this Article, special injury need not be proven, and the costs of abatement are a lien on both the real and personal property used in maintaining the nuisance. Costs of abatement include, but are not limited to, reasonable attorney's fees and court costs.

If it is judicially found after an adversary hearing pursuant to this Article that a tenant or occupant of a building or tenement, under a lawful title, uses such place for the purposes of lewdness, assignation, prostitution, gambling, sale or possession of illegal intoxicating liquors or substances proscribed under the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act, such use makes

void the lease or other title under which he holds, at the option of the owner, and, without any act of the owner, causes the right of possession to revert and vest in such owner."

**Sec. 8.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the General Statutes is further amended by rewriting Section 19-8 thereof as follows:

"§ 19-8 **Costs.** — The prevailing party shall be entitled to his costs. The court shall tax as part of the costs in any action brought hereunder such fee for the attorney prosecuting or defending the action or proceedings as may in the court's discretion be reasonable remuneration for the services performed by such attorney."

**Sec. 9.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the General Statutes is further amended by adding two new sections thereto which shall be designated as G.S. 19-8.1 and G.S. 19-8.2 and which shall read as follows:

"§ 19-81 **Immunity.** — The provisions of any criminal statutes with respect to the exhibition of, or the possession with the intent to exhibit, any obscene film shall not apply to a motion picture projectionist, usher, or ticket taker acting within the scope of his employment, provided that such projectionist, usher, or ticket taker: (1) has no financial interest in the place wherein he is so employed, and (2) freely and willingly gives testimony regarding such employment in any judicial proceedings brought under this Chapter, including pretrial discovery proceedings incident thereto, when and if such is requested, and upon being granted immunity by the trial judge sitting in such matters.

"§ 19-82 **Right of entry.** — Authorized representatives of the Commission for Health Services, any local health department or the Department of Human Resources, upon presenting appropriate credentials to the owner, operator, or agent in charge of a place described in G.S. 19-1.2, are authorized to enter without delay and at any reasonable time any such place in order to inspect and investigate during the regular hours of operation of such place."

**Sec. 10.** Article 1 of Chapter 19 of the General Statutes is further amended by adding a new section thereto which shall be designated as G.S. 19-8.3 and which shall read as follows:

"§ 19-83 **Severability.** — If any section, subsection, sentence, or clause of this Article is adjudged to be unconstitutional or invalid, such adjudication shall not affect the validity of the remaining portion of this Article. It is hereby declared that this Article would have been passed, and each section, sentence, or clause thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more sections, subsections, sentences or clauses might be adjudged to be unconstitutional, or for any other reason invalid."

**Sec. 11.** This act shall become effective on August 1, 1977.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified, this the 30th day of June, 1977.