

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2009**

**SESSION LAW 2009-270
HOUSE BILL 1438**

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR A PILOT PROGRAM TO DETERMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING VIDEOCONFERENCE TECHNOLOGY TO CONDUCT COURT PROCEEDINGS, OTHER THAN TRIALS, INVOLVING PERSONS IN THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND IN LOCAL CONFINEMENT FACILITIES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. The Administrative Office of the Courts, in consultation with the Department of Correction, shall conduct a pilot program to test the feasibility of using videoconference or similar technology to conduct court proceedings involving defendants in the custody of the Department of Correction, instead of requiring live appearances in court for those defendants. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall designate two counties to participate in the pilot, and the Department of Correction shall designate one prison facility. The Administrative Office of the Courts may also designate one or more counties to participate in a pilot program involving persons in the custody of local confinement facilities to test the feasibility of using videoconferencing equipment to conduct proceedings authorized by this act but not otherwise authorized by law.

SECTION 2. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the courts participating in the pilot program authorized by this act may conduct proceedings required under G.S. 15A-511, Article 26 of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes, G.S. 15A-601, and G.S. 15A-941 by videoconference without the consent of the defendant. If a defendant voluntarily and knowingly waives his or her right to appear in person, the court may also accept guilty pleas and impose sentences in cases in which the plea is taken by videoconference, conduct hearings on motions, and conduct probation modification or revocation proceedings. The waiver may be taken by videoconference. In the jurisdictions participating in the pilot programs, no proceeding in which a person is charged with a capital felony may be conducted using videoconferencing equipment, but nothing in this act shall be construed to limit the use of testimony at a trial taken by videoconferencing equipment when the testimony is otherwise allowed by law to be taken in that manner.

SECTION 3. The equipment used in conducting the videoconference proceedings authorized by this act shall be used in a manner that ensures that the judicial official conducting the proceeding and the defendant can see and hear each other and that ensures that the defendant and his or her attorney may communicate during the proceeding in a manner that preserves the defendant's right to confidential communication with counsel.

SECTION 4. The North Carolina Rural Courts Commission, in cooperation with the Department of Correction, shall study the effectiveness of the use of videoconferences for these proceedings and report its findings and recommendations for expansion or modification to the Chief Justice, the Secretary of Correction, the Chairs of the Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on Justice and Public Safety, and the Chairs of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees. The study shall address the costs of implementing videoconferencing on a statewide basis for these purposes, as well as the cost savings obtained



through the use of such equipment, the quality of the transmissions, the frequency of use, and any other relevant information the Commission deems appropriate. The report shall be submitted no later than May 1, 2010. The Administrative Office of the Courts and the Department of Correction may seek grant funds to offset any costs associated with the study that cannot be provided by appropriations to those agencies.

SECTION 5. This act is effective when it becomes law.
In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 1st day of July, 2009.

s/ Walter H. Dalton
President of the Senate

s/ Joe Hackney
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ Beverly E. Perdue
Governor

Approved 10:38 a.m. this 10th day of July, 2009