

Article 5A.

Committee Activity.

**§ 120-19.1. Hearings; examination of witnesses; counsel.**

(a) Committees of either the House or Senate of the General Assembly of North Carolina may hold separate or joint hearings, call witnesses, and compel testimony relevant to any bill, resolution or other matter properly before the committee.

(b) Witnesses may be examined under oath.

(c) When any person is examined before a committee, any member wishing to ask a question must address it to the chairman or presiding officer, who repeats the question or directs the witness to answer the member's question. Staff members or counsel employed by the committee may propound questions to the chairman for a witness to answer.

(d) Objections to the propriety of a question are directed to the committee as a whole. The committee must determine whether the objection is to be sustained or overruled by majority vote of the committee.

(e) When any witness is examined under oath, the proceedings must be taken and transcribed verbatim. Upon request, a witness must be furnished a copy of the transcript of his appearance before the committee.

(f) Witnesses may be accompanied by their own counsel for the purpose of advising them concerning their rights. (1973, c. 543.)

**§ 120-19.2. Invitations to witnesses; when hearings and examinations held; subpoenas.**

(a) Committees of the General Assembly may invite witnesses to appear and testify concerning pending legislation or other matters properly before the committee and may require the attendance of witnesses by subpoena as hereinafter provided. The committee may submit questions in writing to the witness in advance of his appearance. Witnesses may be permitted, in the discretion of the committee, to submit written, sworn statements in addition to or in lieu of sworn oral testimony before the committee.

(b) Hearings and examinations of witnesses concerning pending legislation or other appropriate matter may be conducted during sessions of the General Assembly, during recesses, and in the interim period between sessions, at such times as committees are authorized to convene.

(c) A subpoena for the purpose of obtaining the testimony of a witness may be issued by the chairman of a committee, upon authorization of the Speaker of the House or the Speaker pro tempore of the House for House committees, and the President of the Senate or the President pro tempore of the Senate for Senate committees, and by majority vote of the committee. A subpoena for the purpose of obtaining the testimony of a witness before a joint committee of the House and Senate may be issued by the joint action of the cochairmen of the joint committee, upon authorization of one of the above officers from each house and by majority vote of the joint committee. The subpoena shall be signed by the committee chairman and either the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the President pro tempore of the Senate, or the Speaker pro tempore of the House and shall be directed to the witness, and state the name of the witness, and a description of any papers, documents, or records that he is required to bring with him; and the subpoena shall state the subject matter of the hearing before the committee, the name of the committee, and the name and address of the committee chairman; and the subpoena shall also clearly designate the date, time, and place at which the witness's presence is required.

(d) Any witness shall have five days' notice of hearing, unless waived by the witness, and subpoenas may be served by a member of the General Assembly Special Police, the State Bureau

of Investigation, the State Highway Patrol, or within their respective jurisdiction by any sheriff or deputy, or any municipal police officer or other law-enforcement officer. Members of the General Assembly Special Police may serve subpoenas issued under this Chapter anywhere in the State. In addition, a subpoena may be served in the manner provided for service of subpoenas under the North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.

(e) The form of subpoena shall generally follow the practice in the General Court of Justice in North Carolina with such additional information or modification as shall be approved by the Legislative Services Commission.

(f) Return of the subpoena shall be to the Legislative Services Officer, where a permanent record shall be maintained for five years, and one copy of the subpoena shall be immediately filed with the committee chairman and one copy transmitted to the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the President pro tempore of the Senate, or the Speaker pro tempore of the House, as the case may be. (1973, c. 543; 2011-63, s. 2.)

### **§ 120-19.3. Witness fees and expenses.**

Witnesses subpoenaed to testify before a committee of either house of the General Assembly or a joint committee of the General Assembly shall be entitled to the same fees and expenses as are allowable for witnesses in criminal proceedings in the superior court division of the General Court of Justice. (1973, c. 543.)

### **§ 120-19.4. Failure to respond to subpoena or refusal to testify punishable as contempt.**

(a) Any person who without good cause fails to obey a subpoena which was served upon him, or, fails or refuses to testify shall be deemed to be in contempt of the committee and shall be punished as in the case of a civil contempt under the procedures set out in subsection (b). Any person whose action in the immediate presence of the committee directly tends to disrupt its proceedings may also be punished as in the case of a civil contempt under the procedures set out in subsection (b).

(b) If by a majority vote the committee deems that any person is in contempt under the provisions of subsection (a) the committee shall file a complaint signed by the chairman in the General Court of Justice, superior court division, requesting that the court issue an order directing that the person appear within a reasonable time and show good cause why he should not be held in contempt of the committee or its processes. If the person does not establish good cause the court shall punish the person in accordance with the provisions of G.S. 5A-12 or G.S. 5A-21, whichever is applicable. (1973, c. 543; 1977, c. 344, s. 2; 1985, c. 790, s. 5.)

### **§ 120-19.4A. Requests to State Bureau of Investigation for background investigation of a person who must be confirmed by legislative action.**

The President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House may request that the State Bureau of Investigation perform a background investigation on a person who must be appointed or confirmed by the General Assembly, the Senate, or the House of Representatives. The person being investigated shall be given written notice by regular mail at least 10 days prior to the date that the State Bureau of Investigation is requested to perform the background investigation by the presiding officer of the body from which the request originated. There is a rebuttable presumption that the person being investigated received the notice if the presiding officer has a copy of the notice. The State Bureau of Investigation shall perform the requested background investigation and shall provide the information, including criminal records, to the presiding officer of the body from

which the request originated. A copy of the information also shall be provided to the person being investigated. The term "background investigation" shall be limited to an investigation of a person's criminal record, educational background, employment record, records concerning the listing and payment of taxes, and credit record, and to a requirement that the person provide the information contained in the statements of economic interest required to be filed by persons subject to Chapter 138A of the General Statutes. (1987, c. 867, s. 2; 2008-213, s. 89; 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 6.1.)

#### **§ 120-19.5. Committee staff assistance.**

Upon a certificate of need from the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the President pro tempore of the Senate, or the Speaker pro tempore of the House and upon request of the committee chairman, the Legislative Services Officer is authorized to assign to any standing committee having interim research, drafting, or hearing assignment one or more members of his staff who shall function as research assistant and counsel to the committee when needed. (1973, c. 543.)

#### **§ 120-19.6. Interim committee activity; rules.**

(a) Upon a general directive by resolution of the house in question or upon a specific authorization of either the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, President Pro Tempore of the Senate or the Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, any standing committee, select committee or subcommittee of either house of the General Assembly is authorized to meet in the interim period between sessions or during recesses of the General Assembly to consider specific bills or resolutions or other matters properly before the committee. No particular form of authority is needed, but this section is intended to promote better coordination by having a system of authorization for meetings of the committees of the General Assembly between sessions or during recesses. Meetings will be held in Raleigh, but with the approval of the Speaker or Speaker Pro Tempore, a House committee may meet elsewhere; and with the approval of the President or President Pro Tempore, a Senate committee may meet elsewhere. In addition, committees may meet at such places as authorized by specific resolution or action of either body of the General Assembly.

(a1) The Speaker of the House or the President Pro Tempore of the Senate may authorize, in writing, the creation of interim study committees to study and investigate governmental agencies and institutions and matters of public policy to assist that chamber in performing its duties in the most efficient and effective manner. The Speaker of the House or the President Pro Tempore of the Senate may appoint members of the relevant chamber, State officers and employees, and members of the public to the interim study committee. An interim study committee created under this subsection shall be deemed a committee of the relevant chamber for the purposes of this Article. Interim study committee members who are State officers and employees or members of the public shall receive subsistence and travel expenses as provided in G.S. 120-3.1, 138-5, or 138-6, as appropriate.

(b) In all other respects, committees shall function in the interim period between sessions or during recesses in the same manner and under the rules generally applicable to committees of the house in question of the General Assembly during the session of the General Assembly.

(c) Any committee during the interim period that meets upon specific authorization of the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, President Pro Tempore of the Senate or Speaker Pro Tempore of the House shall limit its activities to those matters contained in the authorization, and

shall suspend its activities upon written directive of such officer. Any interim committee that meets upon a directive by resolution of the house in question of the General Assembly shall limit its activities to those matters contained in the authorization. (1973, c. 543; 2001-491, s. 33.2.)

**§ 120-19.7. Subcommittees.**

By consent and approval of a majority of any committee, the chairman may designate a subcommittee of not less than five persons to conduct hearings, call witnesses, and inquire into any matters properly before the committee. A duly constituted subcommittee shall have all of the powers of the full committee, but any subcommittee shall cease its activities upon majority vote of the full committee, or as provided in G.S. 120-19.6. (1973, c. 543.)

**§ 120-19.8. Limitation by resolution of either house.**

The provisions of G.S. 120-19.5 pertaining to staff assistance and the provisions of G.S. 120-19.6 pertaining to interim committee activity shall not apply to the House if the House by rule or resolution shall adopt an alternate method of staff assistance or interim committee activity and shall not apply to the Senate if the Senate by rule or resolution shall adopt an alternate method of staff assistance or interim committee activity. Either house of the General Assembly shall have the right to determine any matter concerning the scope of its internal procedure by appropriate rule or resolution without the joinder of the other. (1973, c. 543.)

**§ 120-19.9. Local acts affecting State highway system to be considered by transportation committees.**

Any local bill affecting the State highway system shall, prior to its passage, be referred to a committee of either the House or Senate charged with the responsibility of examining bills or issues related to transportation or to the State highway system. (1987, c. 747, s. 24.)