

§ 153A-123. Enforcement of ordinances.

(a) A county may provide for fines and penalties for violation of its ordinances and may secure injunctions and abatement orders to further insure compliance with its ordinances, as provided by this section.

(b) Except for the types of ordinances listed in subsection (b1) of this section, violation of a county ordinance may be a misdemeanor or infraction as provided by G.S. 14-4 only if the county specifies such in the ordinance. An ordinance may provide by express statement that the maximum fine, term of imprisonment, or infraction penalty to be imposed for a violation is some amount of money or number of days less than the maximum imposed by G.S. 14-4. Notwithstanding G.S. 153A-45, no ordinance specifying a criminal penalty may be enacted at the meeting in which it is first introduced.

(b1) No ordinance of the following types may impose a criminal penalty:

- (1) Any ordinance adopted under Article 18 of this Chapter, Planning and Regulation of Development or, its successor, Chapter 160D of the General Statutes, except for those ordinances related to unsafe buildings.
- (2) Any ordinance adopted pursuant to G.S. 153A-134, Regulating and licensing businesses, trades, etc.
- (3) Any ordinance adopted pursuant to G.S. 153A-138, Registration of mobile homes, house trailers, etc.
- (4) Any ordinance adopted pursuant to G.S. 153A-140.1, Stream-clearing programs.
- (5) Any ordinance adopted pursuant to G.S. 153A-143, Regulation of outdoor advertising or, its successor, G.S. 160D-912, Outdoor advertising.
- (6) Any ordinance adopted pursuant to G.S. 153A-144, Limitations on regulating solar collectors or, its successor, G.S. 160D-914, Solar collectors.
- (7) Any ordinance adopted pursuant to G.S. 153A-145, Limitations on regulating cisterns and rain barrels.
- (8) Any ordinance regulating trees.

(c) An ordinance may provide that violation subjects the offender to a civil penalty to be recovered by the county in a civil action in the nature of debt if the offender does not pay the penalty within a prescribed period of time after he has been cited for violation of the ordinance.

(c1) An ordinance may provide for the recovery of a civil penalty by the county for violation of the North Carolina Fire Code of the North Carolina State Building Code as authorized under G.S. 143-139.

(d) An ordinance may provide that it may be enforced by an appropriate equitable remedy issuing from a court of competent jurisdiction. In such a case, the General Court of Justice has jurisdiction to issue any order that may be appropriate, and it is not a defense to the county's application for equitable relief that there is an adequate remedy at law.

(e) An ordinance that makes unlawful a condition existing upon or use made of real property may provide that it may be enforced by injunction and order of abatement, and the General Court of Justice has jurisdiction to issue such an order. When a violation of such an ordinance occurs, the county may apply to the appropriate division of the General Court of Justice for a mandatory or prohibitory injunction and order of abatement commanding the defendant to correct the unlawful condition upon or cease the unlawful use of the property. The action shall be governed in all respects by the laws and rules governing civil proceedings, including the Rules of Civil Procedure in general and Rule 65 in particular.

In addition to an injunction, the court may enter an order of abatement as a part of the judgment in the cause. An order of abatement may direct that buildings or other structures on the property be closed, demolished, or removed; that fixtures, furniture, or other movable property be removed from buildings on the property; that grass and weeds be cut; that improvements or

repairs be made; or that any other action be taken that is necessary to bring the property into compliance with the ordinance. If the defendant fails or refuses to comply with an injunction or with an order of abatement within the time allowed by the court, he may be cited for contempt and the county may execute the order of abatement. If the county executes the order, it has a lien on the property, in the nature of a mechanic's and materialman's lien, for the costs of executing the order. The defendant may secure cancellation of an order of abatement by paying all costs of the proceedings and posting a bond for compliance with the order. The bond shall be given with sureties approved by the clerk of superior court in an amount approved by the judge before whom the matter was heard and shall be conditioned on the defendant's full compliance with the terms of the order of abatement within the time fixed by the judge. Cancellation of an order of abatement does not suspend or cancel an injunction issued in conjunction with the order.

(f) Subject to the express terms of the ordinance, a county ordinance may be enforced by any one or more of the remedies authorized by this section.

(g) A county ordinance may provide, when appropriate, that each day's continuing violation is a separate and distinct offense.

(h) Notwithstanding any authority under this Article or any local act of the General Assembly, no ordinance regulating trees may be enforced on land owned or operated by a public airport authority. (1973, c. 822, s. 1; 1985, c. 764, s. 34; 1985 (Reg. Sess., 1986), c. 852, s. 17; 1993, c. 329, s. 5; 2013-331, s. 1; 2021-138, s. 13(a); 2024-49, s. 5.2(m).)