§ 50B-2. Institution of civil action; motion for emergency relief; temporary orders; temporary custody.

(a) Any person residing in this State may seek relief under this Chapter by filing a civil action or by filing a motion in any existing action filed under Chapter 50 of the General Statutes alleging acts of domestic violence against himself or herself or a minor child who resides with or is in the custody of such person. Any aggrieved party entitled to relief under this Chapter may file a civil action and proceed pro se, without the assistance of legal counsel. The district court division of the General Court of Justice shall have original jurisdiction over actions instituted under this Chapter. Any action for a domestic violence protective order requires that a summons be issued and served. The summons issued pursuant to this Chapter shall require the defendant to answer within 10 days of the date of service. Attachments to the summons shall include the complaint, notice of hearing, any temporary or ex parte order that has been issued, and other papers through the appropriate law enforcement agency where the defendant is to be served. In compliance with the federal Violence Against Women Act, no court costs or attorneys' fees shall be assessed for the filing, issuance, registration, or service of a protective order or petition for a protective order or witness subpoena, except as provided in G.S. 1A-1, Rule 11.

(b) Emergency Relief. – A party may move the court for emergency relief if he or she believes there is a danger of serious and immediate injury to himself or herself or a minor child. A hearing on a motion for emergency relief, where no ex parte order is entered, shall be held after five days' notice of the hearing to the other party or after five days from the date of service of process on the other party, whichever occurs first, provided, however, that no hearing shall be required if the service of process is not completed on the other party. If the party is proceeding pro se and does not request an ex parte hearing, the clerk shall set a date for hearing and issue a notice of hearing within the time periods provided in this subsection, and shall effect service of the summons, complaint, notice, and other papers through the appropriate law enforcement agency where the defendant is to be served.

(c) Ex Parte Orders. –

(1) Prior to the hearing, if it clearly appears to the court from specific facts shown, that there is a danger of acts of domestic violence against the aggrieved party or a minor child, the court may enter orders as it deems necessary to protect the aggrieved party or minor children from those acts.

(2) A temporary order for custody ex parte and prior to service of process and notice shall not be entered unless the court finds that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse.

(3) If the court finds that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse, upon request of the aggrieved party, the court shall consider and may order the other party to (i) stay away from a minor child, or (ii) return a minor child to, or not remove a minor child from, the physical care of a parent or person in loco parentis, if the court finds that the order is in the best interest of the minor child and is necessary for the safety of the minor child.

(4) If the court determines that it is in the best interest of the minor child for the other party to have contact with the minor child or children, the court shall issue an order designed to protect the safety and well-being of the minor child and the aggrieved party. The order shall specify the terms of contact between the other party and the minor child and may include a specific schedule of time and location of exchange of the minor child, supervision by a third party or supervised visitation center, and any other conditions that will ensure both the well-being of the minor child and the aggrieved party.

(5) Upon the issuance of an ex parte order under this subsection, a hearing shall be held within 10 days from the date of issuance of the order or within seven days from the date of service of process on the other party, whichever occurs later. A continuance shall be limited to one extension of no more than 10 days unless all parties consent or good cause is shown. The hearing shall have priority on the court calendar.

(6) If an aggrieved party acting pro se requests ex parte relief, the clerk of superior court shall schedule an ex parte hearing with the district court division of the General Court of Justice within 72 hours of the filing for said relief, or by the end of the next day on which the district court is in session in the county in which the action was filed, whichever shall first occur. If the district court is not in session in said county, the aggrieved party may contact the clerk of superior court in any other county within the same judicial district who shall schedule an ex parte hearing with the district court division of the General Court of Justice by the end of the next day on which said court division is in session in that county.

(7) Upon the issuance of an ex parte order under this subsection, if the party is proceeding pro se, the Clerk shall set a date for hearing and issue a notice of hearing within the time periods provided in this subsection, and shall effect service of the summons, complaint, notice, order and other papers through the appropriate law enforcement agency where the defendant is to be served.

(c1) Ex Parte Orders by Authorized Magistrate. – The chief district court judge may authorize a magistrate or magistrates to hear any motions for emergency relief ex parte. Prior to the hearing, if the magistrate determines that at the time the party is seeking emergency relief ex parte the district court is not in session and a district court judge is not and will not be available to hear the motion for a period of four or more hours, the motion may be heard by the magistrate. When the office of the clerk is closed and a magistrate has been authorized under this section to hear a motion for emergency relief ex parte, an authorized magistrate shall accept for filing a complaint alleging domestic violence and motion for emergency relief ex parte, note thereon the filing date, and the magistrate shall issue a summons. Any endorsement or alias and pluries summons pursuant to G.S. 1A-1, Rule 4(d) shall be issued by the clerk, assistant clerk, or deputy clerk of the court in the county in which the action is commenced. Any complaint and motion for emergency relief ex parte and any other documents accepted for filing under this section and any order entered by the magistrate shall be delivered to the clerk's office for processing as soon as that office is open for business. If it clearly appears to the magistrate from specific facts shown that there is a danger of acts of domestic violence against the aggrieved party or a minor child, the magistrate may enter orders as it deems necessary to protect the aggrieved party or minor children from those acts, except that a temporary order for custody ex parte and prior to service of process and notice shall not be entered unless the magistrate finds that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse. If the magistrate finds that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse, upon request of the aggrieved party, the magistrate shall consider and may order the other party to stay away from a minor child, or to return a minor child to, or not remove a minor child from, the physical care of a parent or person in loco parentis, if the magistrate finds that the order is in the best interest of the minor child and is necessary for the safety of the minor child. If the magistrate determines that it is in the best interest of the minor child for the other party to have contact with the minor child or children, the magistrate shall issue an order designed to protect the safety and well-being of the minor child and the aggrieved party. The order shall specify the terms of contact between the other party and the minor child and may include a specific schedule of time and location of exchange of the minor child, supervision by a third party or supervised visitation center, and any

other conditions that will ensure both the well-being of the minor child and the aggrieved party. An ex parte order entered under this subsection shall expire and the magistrate shall schedule an ex parte hearing before a district court judge by the end of the next day on which the district court is in session in the county in which the action was filed. Ex parte orders entered by the district court judge pursuant to this subsection shall be entered and scheduled in accordance with subsection (c) of this section.

(c2) The authority granted to authorized magistrates to award temporary child custody pursuant to subsection (c1) of this section and pursuant to G.S. 50B-3(a)(4) is granted subject to custody rules to be established by the supervising chief district judge of each judicial district.

(d) Pro Se Forms. – The clerk of superior court of each county shall provide to pro se complainants all forms that are necessary or appropriate to enable them to proceed pro se pursuant to this section. The clerk shall, whenever feasible, provide a private area for complainants to fill out forms and make inquiries. The clerk shall provide a supply of pro se forms to authorized magistrates who shall make the forms available to complainants seeking relief under subsection (c1) of this section.

(e) All documents filed, issued, registered, or served in an action under this Chapter relating to an ex parte, emergency, or permanent domestic violence protective order may be filed electronically. (1979, c. 561, s. 1; 1985, c. 113, ss. 2, 3; 1987 (Reg. Sess., 1988), c. 893, s. 2; 1989, c. 461, s. 1; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 4, s. 1; 1997-471, s. 2; 2001-518, s. 4; 2002-126, s. 29A.6(a); 2004-186, ss. 17.2, 19.1; 2009-342, s. 2; 2012-20, s. 1; 2013-390, s. 1; 2015-62, s. 3(b); 2021-47, s. 10(i); 2022-47, s. 4(a).)