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Short Title: Medical Liability Reforms.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

February 3, 2011

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO REFORM THE LAWS RELATING TO MONEY JUDGMENT APPEAL
3 BONDS, BIFURCATION OF TRIALS IN CIVIL CASES, AND MEDICAL LIABILITY.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 SECTION 1. G.S. 1-289 reads as rewritten:

6 "§ 1-289. Undertaking to stay execution on money judgment.

7 (a) If the appeal is from a judgment directing the payment of money, it does not stay the
8 execution of the judgment unless a written undertaking is executed on the part of the appellant,
9 by one or more sureties, as set forth in this section.

10 (b) In an action where the judgment directs the payment of money, the court shall
11 specify the amount of the undertaking required to stay execution of the judgment pending
12 appeal as provided in subsection (c) of this section. The undertaking shall be to the effect that if
13 the judgment appealed from, or any part thereof, is affirmed, or the appeal is dismissed, the
14 appellant will pay the amount directed to be paid by the judgment, or the part of such amount
15 as to which the judgment shall be affirmed, if affirmed only in part, and all damages which
16 shall be awarded against the appellant upon the appeal, except as provided in subsection (b) of
17 this section. Whenever it is satisfactorily made to appear to the court that since the execution of
18 the undertaking the sureties have become insolvent, the court may, by rule or order, require the
19 appellant to execute, file and serve a new undertaking, as above. In case of neglect to execute
20 such undertaking within twenty days after the service of a copy of the rule or order requiring it,
21 the appeal may, on motion to the court, be dismissed with costs. Whenever it is necessary for a
22 party to an action or proceeding to give a bond or an undertaking with surety or sureties, he
23 may, in lieu thereof, deposit with the officer into court money to the amount of the bond or
24 undertaking to be given. The court in which the action or proceeding is pending may direct
25 what disposition shall be made of such money pending the action or proceeding. In a case
26 where, by this section, the money is to be deposited with an officer, a judge of the court, upon
27 the application of either party, may, at any time before the deposit is made, order the money
28 deposited in court instead of with the officer; and a deposit made pursuant to such order is of
29 the same effect as if made with the officer. The perfecting of an appeal by giving the
30 undertaking mentioned in this section stays proceedings in the court below upon the judgment
31 appealed from; except when the sale of perishable property is directed, the court below may
32 order the property to be sold and the proceeds thereof to be deposited or invested, to abide the
33 judgment of the appellate court.



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1 (c) The amount of the undertaking that shall be required by the court shall be an amount
2 determined by the court after notice and hearing proper and reasonable for the security of the
3 rights of the adverse party, considering relevant factors, including the following:

4 (1) The amount of the judgment.

5 (2) The amount of the limits of all applicable liability policies of the appellant
6 judgment debtor.

7 (3) The aggregate net worth of the appellant judgment debtor.

8 ~~(b)~~(d) If the appellee in a civil action brought under any legal theory obtains a judgment
9 directing the payment or expenditure of money in the amount of twenty five million dollars
10 (\$25,000,000) or more, and the appellant seeks a stay of execution of the judgment within the
11 period of time during which the appellant has the right to pursue appellate review, including
12 discretionary review and certiorari, the amount of the undertaking that the appellant is required
13 to execute to stay execution of the judgment during the entire period of the appeal shall be
14 twenty five million dollars (\$25,000,000).

15 ~~(e)~~(e) If the appellee proves by a preponderance of the evidence that the appellant for
16 whom the undertaking has been limited under subsection ~~(b)~~(d) of this section is, for the
17 purpose of evading the judgment, (i) dissipating its assets, (ii) secreting its assets, or (iii)
18 diverting its assets outside the jurisdiction of the courts of North Carolina or the federal courts
19 of the United States other than in the ordinary course of business, then the limitation in
20 subsection ~~(b)~~(d) of this section shall not apply and the appellant shall be required to make an
21 undertaking in the full amount otherwise required by this section."

22 **SECTION 2.** G.S. 1A-1, Rule 42(b), is amended by adding a new subdivision to
23 read:

24 "(b) Separate trials. –

25 (1) The court may in furtherance of convenience or to avoid prejudice and shall
26 for considerations of venue upon timely motion order a separate trial of any
27 claim, cross-claim, counterclaim, or third-party claim, or of any separate
28 issue or of any number of claims, cross-claims, counterclaims, third-party
29 claims, or issues.

30 (2) Upon motion of any party in an action that includes a claim commenced
31 under Article 1G of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes involving a managed
32 care entity as defined in G.S. 90-21.50, the court shall order separate
33 discovery and a separate trial of any claim, cross-claim, counterclaim, or
34 third-party claim against a physician or other medical provider.

35 (3) Upon motion of any party in an action in tort wherein the plaintiff seeks
36 damages exceeding one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000), the court
37 shall order separate trials for the issue of liability and the issue of damages,
38 unless the court for good cause shown orders a single trial. Evidence relating
39 solely to compensatory damages shall not be admissible until the trier of fact
40 has determined that the defendant is liable. The same trier of fact that tries
41 the issues relating to liability shall try the issues relating to damages."

42 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 1A-1, Rule 9(j), reads as rewritten:

43 "(j) Medical malpractice. – Any complaint alleging medical malpractice by a health care
44 provider ~~as defined in pursuant to G.S. 90-21.11~~G.S. 90-21.11(2)a. in failing to comply with
45 the applicable standard of care under G.S. 90-21.12 shall be dismissed unless:

46 (1) The pleading specifically asserts that the medical care ~~has~~and all medical
47 records pertaining to the alleged negligence and resulting injuries that are
48 available to the plaintiff after reasonable inquiry have been reviewed by a
49 person who is reasonably expected to qualify as an expert witness under
50 Rule 702 of the Rules of Evidence and who is willing to testify that the
51 medical care did not comply with the applicable standard of care;

- 1 (2) The pleading specifically asserts that the medical care ~~has and all medical~~
 2 records pertaining to the alleged negligence and resulting injuries that are
 3 available to the plaintiff after reasonable inquiry have been reviewed by a
 4 person that the complainant will seek to have qualified as an expert witness
 5 by motion under Rule 702(e) of the Rules of Evidence and who is willing to
 6 testify that the medical care did not comply with the applicable standard of
 7 care, and the motion is filed with the complaint; or
- 8 (3) The pleading alleges facts establishing negligence under the existing
 9 common-law doctrine of res ipsa loquitur.

10 Upon motion by the complainant prior to the expiration of the applicable statute of
 11 limitations, a resident judge of the superior court for a judicial district in which venue for the
 12 cause of action is appropriate under G.S. 1-82 or, if no resident judge for that judicial district is
 13 physically present in that judicial district, otherwise available, or able or willing to consider the
 14 motion, then any presiding judge of the superior court for that judicial district may allow a
 15 motion to extend the statute of limitations for a period not to exceed 120 days to file a
 16 complaint in a medical malpractice action in order to comply with this Rule, upon a
 17 determination that good cause exists for the granting of the motion and that the ends of justice
 18 would be served by an extension. The plaintiff shall provide, at the request of the defendant,
 19 proof of compliance with this subsection through up to ten written interrogatories, the answers
 20 to which shall be verified by the expert required under this subsection. These interrogatories do
 21 not count against the interrogatory limit under Rule 33."

22 **SECTION 4.** G.S. 8C-702(h) reads as rewritten:

23 "(h) Notwithstanding subsection (b) of this section, in a medical malpractice action as
 24 defined in G.S. 90-21.11(2)b. against a hospital, or other health care or medical facility, a
 25 person ~~may shall not~~ give expert testimony on the appropriate standard of care as to
 26 administrative or other nonclinical issues ~~if unless~~ the person has substantial knowledge, by
 27 virtue of his or her training and experience, about the standard of care among hospitals, or
 28 health care or medical facilities, of the same type as the hospital, or health care or medical
 29 facility, whose actions or inactions are the subject of the testimony situated in the same or
 30 similar communities at the time of the alleged act giving rise to the cause of action."

31 **SECTION 5.** G.S. 90-21.11 reads as rewritten:

32 "**§ 90-21.11. Definitions.**

33 ~~As used~~ The following definitions apply in this Article, Article:

- 34 (1) ~~the term "health care provider" means~~ Health care provider. — without
 35 limitation ~~Without limitation, any of the following:~~
- 36 a. ~~any~~ A person who pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 90 of the
 37 General Statutes is licensed, or is otherwise registered or certified to
 38 engage in the practice of or otherwise performs duties associated
 39 with any of the following: medicine, surgery, dentistry, pharmacy,
 40 optometry, midwifery, osteopathy, podiatry, chiropractic, radiology,
 41 nursing, physiotherapy, pathology, anesthesiology, anesthesia,
 42 laboratory analysis, rendering assistance to a physician, dental
 43 hygiene, ~~psychiatry, psychology; psychiatry, or psychology.~~
- 44 b. ~~or a~~ A hospital ~~or hospital,~~ a nursing home; home licensed under
 45 Chapter 131E of the General Statutes, or an adult care home licensed
 46 under Chapter 131D of the General Statutes.
- 47 c. ~~or any~~ Any other person who is legally responsible for the negligence
 48 of ~~such person, hospital or nursing home;~~ a person described by
 49 sub-subdivision a. of this subdivision, a hospital, a nursing home
 50 licensed under Chapter 131E of the General Statutes, or an adult care
 51 home licensed under Chapter 131D of the General Statutes.

d. ~~or any~~Any other person acting at the direction or under the supervision of ~~any of the foregoing persons,~~ a person described by sub-subdivision a. of this subdivision, a hospital, or a nursing home licensed under Chapter 131E of the General Statutes, or an adult care home licensed under Chapter 131D of the General Statutes.

(2) ~~As used in this Article, the term "medical malpractice action" means~~ Medical malpractice action. – Either of the following:

a. ~~a~~A civil action for damages for personal injury or death arising out of the furnishing or failure to furnish professional services in the performance of medical, dental, or other health care by a health care provider.

b. A civil action against a hospital, a nursing home licensed under Chapter 131E of the General Statutes, or an adult care home licensed under Chapter 131D of the General Statutes for damages for personal injury or death, when the civil action (i) alleges a breach of administrative or corporate duties to the patient, including, but not limited to, allegations of negligent credentialing or negligent monitoring and supervision and (ii) arises from the same facts or circumstances as a claim under sub-subdivision a. of this subdivision."

SECTION 6. G.S. 90-21.12 reads as rewritten:

"§ 90-21.12. Standard of health care.

(a) ~~Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, in~~any medical malpractice action as defined in G.S. 90-21.11(2)(a), action for damages for personal injury or death arising out of the furnishing or the failure to furnish professional services in the performance of medical, dental, or other health care, the defendant health care provider shall not be liable for the payment of damages unless the trier of the facts~~fact is satisfied~~finds by the greater weight of the evidence that the care of such health care provider was not in accordance with the standards of practice among members of the same health care profession with similar training and experience situated in the same or similar communities under the same or similar circumstances at the time of the alleged act giving rise to the cause of action; or in the case of a medical malpractice action as defined in G.S. 90-21.11(2)(b), the defendant health care provider shall not be liable for the payment of damages unless the trier of fact finds by the greater weight of the evidence that the action or inaction of such health care provider was not in accordance with the standards of practice among similar health care providers situated in the same or similar communities under the same or similar circumstances at the time of the alleged act giving rise to the cause of action.

(b) In any medical malpractice action arising out of the furnishing or the failure to furnish professional services in a hospital emergency room, the claimant must prove a violation of the standard of health care set forth in subsection (a) of this section by clear and convincing evidence."

SECTION 7. Article 1B of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes is amended by adding the following new section to read:

"§ 90-21.19. Liability limit for noneconomic damages.

(a) In any medical malpractice action in which the plaintiff is entitled to an award of noneconomic damages, the total amount of noneconomic damages for which judgment is entered against all defendants shall not exceed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000). On January 1 of every third year, beginning with January 1, 2014, the Administrative Office of the Courts shall reset the limitation on damages for noneconomic loss set forth in this subsection to be equal to five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) times the ratio of the Consumer Price

1 Index for November of the prior year to the Consumer Price Index for November 2011. In the
2 event that any verdict or award of noneconomic damages stated pursuant to G.S. 90-21.19B(1)
3 exceeds these limits, the court shall modify the judgment as necessary to conform to the
4 requirements of this subsection.

5 (b) The following definitions apply in this section:

6 (1) Consumer Price Index. – The Consumer Price Index – All Urban
7 Consumers, for the South urban area, as published by the Bureau of Labor
8 Statistics of the United States Department of Labor.

9 (2) Noneconomic damages. – Damages to compensate for pain, suffering,
10 emotional distress, loss of consortium, inconvenience, and any other
11 nonpecuniary compensatory damage other than damages to compensate for
12 disfigurement, loss of use of part of the body, permanent injury, or death.
13 "Noneconomic damages" does not include punitive damages as defined in
14 G.S. 1D-5.

15 (c) Any award of damages in a medical malpractice action shall be stated in accordance
16 with G.S. 90-21.19B. If a jury is determining the facts, the court shall not instruct the jury with
17 respect to the limit of noneconomic damages under subsection (a) of this section, and neither
18 the attorney for any party nor a witness shall inform the jury or potential members of the jury
19 panel of that limit."

20 **SECTION 8.** Article 1B of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes is amended by
21 adding the following new section to read:

22 **"§ 90-21.19B. Verdicts and awards of damages in medical malpractice actions; form.**

23 In any malpractice action, any verdict or award of damages, if supported by the evidence,
24 shall indicate specifically what amount, if any, is awarded for noneconomic damages. If
25 applicable, the court shall instruct the jury on the definition of noneconomic damages under
26 G.S. 90-21.19(b)."

27 **SECTION 9.** G.S. 1-17 reads as rewritten:

28 **"§ 1-17. Disabilities.**

29 (a) A person entitled to commence an action who is under a disability at the time the
30 cause of action accrued may bring his or her action within the time limited in this Subchapter,
31 after the disability is removed, except in an action for the recovery of real property, or to make
32 an entry or defense founded on the title to real property, or to rents and services out of the real
33 property, when the person must commence his or her action, or make the entry, within three
34 years next after the removal of the disability, and at no time thereafter.

35 For the purpose of this section, a person is under a disability if the person meets one or
36 more of the following conditions:

37 (1) The person is within the age of 18 years.

38 (2) The person is insane.

39 (3) The person is incompetent as defined in G.S. 35A-1101(7) or (8).

40 (a1) For those persons under a disability on January 1, 1976, as a result of being
41 imprisoned on a criminal charge, or in execution under sentence for a criminal offense, the
42 statute of limitations shall commence to run and no longer be tolled from January 1, 1976.

43 (b) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, and except as
44 otherwise provided in subsection (c) of this section, an action on behalf of a minor for
45 malpractice arising out of the performance of or failure to perform professional services shall
46 be commenced within the limitations of time specified in G.S. 1-15(c), except that if those time
47 limitations expire before the minor attains the full age of 19 years, the action may be brought
48 before the minor attains the full age of 19 years.

49 (c) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) and (b) of this section, an action on
50 behalf of a minor for injuries alleged to have resulted from malpractice arising out of a health

1 care provider's performance of or failure to perform professional services shall be commenced
2 within the limitations of time specified in G.S. 1-15(c), except as follows:

3 (1) If the time limitations specified in G.S. 1-15(c) expire before the minor
4 attains the full age of 10 years, the action may be brought any time before
5 the minor attains the full age of 10 years.

6 (2) If the time limitations in G.S. 1-15(c) have expired and before a minor
7 reaches the full age of 18 years a court has entered judgment or consent
8 order under the provisions of Chapter 7B of the General Statutes finding that
9 said minor is an abused or neglected juvenile as defined in G.S. 7B-101, the
10 medical malpractice action shall be commenced within three years from the
11 date of such judgment or consent order, or before the minor attains the full
12 age of 10 years, whichever is later.

13 (3) If the time limitations in G.S. 1-15(c) have expired and a minor is in legal
14 custody of the State, a county, or an approved child placing agency as
15 defined in G.S. 131D-10.2, the medical malpractice action shall be
16 commenced within one year after the minor is no longer in such legal
17 custody, or before the minor attains the full age of 10 years, whichever is
18 later."

19 **SECTION 10.** Severability. – If the provisions of Section 7 of this act are declared
20 to be unconstitutional or otherwise invalid by final decision of a court of competent
21 jurisdiction, then Section 8 and Section 9 of this act are repealed, but the invalidity does not
22 affect other provisions or applications of this act that can be given effect without the invalid
23 provisions. If any other provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is
24 held invalid, the remainder of this act or the application of the provision to other persons or
25 circumstances is not affected.

26 **SECTION 11.** Sections 5, 6 and 9 of this act become effective October 1, 2011,
27 and apply to causes of actions arising on or after that date. The remainder of this act becomes
28 effective October 1, 2011, and applies to actions commenced on or after that date.