

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2019

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HOUSE BILL 918

Short Title: Amend Abuse Laws/Expedite Permanency. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Jarvis, Stevens, and Murphy (Primary Sponsors).  
*For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.*

Referred to: Health, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

April 22, 2019

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO AMEND VARIOUS ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND DEPENDENCY LAWS TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS, EXPEDITE THE GOAL OF PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN UNDER THREE YEARS OF AGE WHO HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THE HOME, CREATE A PRESUMPTION THAT FOSTER PARENTS WITH WHOM A CHILD UNDER THREE YEARS OF AGE HAS LIVED CONTINUOUSLY FOR NINE MONTHS ARE DEEMED NONRELATIVE KIN, AND CREATE AN AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCE FOR THE EXPOSURE TO NONMEDICAL, CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES IN UTERO.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** G.S. 7B-100 is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

**"§ 7B-100. Purpose.**

This Subchapter shall be interpreted and construed so as to implement the following purposes and policies:

(6) To provide juveniles under 3 years of age who are removed from custody of their homes with prospective permanent placement within one year from the date of the initial order removing custody."

**SECTION 2.** G.S. 7B-101 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 7B-101. Definitions.**

As used in this Subchapter, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the following words have the listed meanings:

...

(15a) Nonrelative kin. – An individual having a substantial relationship with the ~~juvenile~~ juvenile, including the presumption that a foster parent with whom a juvenile under 3 years of age has resided for a continuous period of at least nine months is deemed nonrelative kin for purposes of this Subchapter. In the case of a juvenile member of a State-recognized tribe as set forth in G.S. 143B-407(a), nonrelative kin also includes any member of a State-recognized tribe or a member of a federally recognized tribe, whether or not there is a substantial relationship with the juvenile.

...

(18a) Relative. – An individual directly related to the juvenile, including, but not limited to, a parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt, or uncle.

~~(18a)~~(18b) Responsible individual. – A parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker who abuses or seriously neglects a juvenile.



\* H 9 1 8 - V - 1 \*

1           ~~(18b)~~(18c) Return home or reunification. – Placement of the juvenile in the home of  
2           either parent or placement of the juvenile in the home of a guardian or  
3           custodian from whose home the child was removed by court order.

4           ...."

5           **SECTION 3.** G.S. 7B-503(a) is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

6           "(a) When a request is made for nonsecure custody, the court shall first consider release  
7           of the juvenile to the juvenile's parent, relative, guardian, custodian, or other responsible adult.  
8           An order for nonsecure custody shall be made only when there is a reasonable factual basis to  
9           believe the matters alleged in the petition are true, and any of the following apply:

10           ...

11           (7) The juvenile is an infant who (i) was born drug-exposed and the drug exposure  
12           was not medically based, (ii) the parent is unable to discharge parental  
13           responsibilities due to a history of chronic drug abuse, and (iii) there are  
14           reasonable grounds to believe that the parent's substance abuse will continue  
15           for a prolonged or indeterminate period based on the opinion of a licensed  
16           health care provider with substance abuse disorders experience.

17           ...."

18           **SECTION 4.** G.S. 7B-505(b) reads as rewritten:

19           "(b) The court shall order the department of social services to make diligent efforts to  
20           notify relatives and other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile that the juvenile  
21           is in nonsecure custody and of any hearings scheduled to occur pursuant to G.S. 7B-506, unless  
22           the court finds the notification would be contrary to the best interests of the juvenile. The  
23           department of social services shall use due diligence to identify and notify adult relatives, next  
24           of kin, and other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile within 60 days after the  
25           initial order removing custody. The department shall file with the court information regarding  
26           attempts made to identify and notify adult relatives of the child, next of kin, and persons with  
27           legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile. In placing a juvenile in nonsecure custody under this  
28           section, the court shall first consider whether a relative of the juvenile is willing and able to  
29           provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. If the court finds that the  
30           relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision in a safe home, then the court  
31           shall order placement of the juvenile with the relative unless the court finds that placement with  
32           the relative would be contrary to the best interests of the ~~juvenile~~juvenile, including, but not  
33           limited to, the developmental and attachment needs of the juvenile."

34           **SECTION 5.** G.S. 7B-901(c)(1)e. reads as rewritten:

35           "(c) If the disposition order places a juvenile in the custody of a county department of  
36           social services, the court shall direct that reasonable efforts for reunification as defined in  
37           G.S. 7B-101 shall not be required if the court makes written findings of fact pertaining to any of  
38           the following, unless the court concludes that there is compelling evidence warranting continued  
39           reunification efforts:

40           (1) A court of competent jurisdiction determines or has determined that  
41           aggravated circumstances exist because the parent has committed or  
42           encouraged the commission of, or allowed the continuation of, any of the  
43           following upon the juvenile:

44           ...

45           e. Chronic or toxic exposure to alcohol or controlled substances that  
46           causes impairment of or addiction in the ~~juvenile~~juvenile, including  
47           exposure to nonmedical controlled substances in utero.

48           ...."

49           **SECTION 6.** G.S. 7B-903(a1) reads as rewritten:

50           "(a1) In placing a juvenile in out-of-home care under this section, the court shall first  
51           consider whether a relative of the juvenile is willing and able to provide proper care and

1 supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. If the court finds that the relative is willing and able  
2 to provide proper care and supervision in a safe home, then the court shall order placement of the  
3 juvenile with the relative unless the court finds that the placement is contrary to the best interests  
4 of the ~~juvenile.~~ juvenile, including, but not limited to, the developmental and attachment needs  
5 of the juvenile. Once a child under 3 years of age has resided in the home of a foster parent for a  
6 continuous period of at least nine months, the foster parent is deemed to be a relative for purposes  
7 of this subsection. In placing a juvenile in out-of-home care under this section, the court shall  
8 also consider whether it is in the juvenile's best interest to remain in the juvenile's community of  
9 residence. Placement of a juvenile with a relative outside of this State must be in accordance with  
10 the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.

11 If the court does not place the juvenile with a relative pursuant to this subsection, the court  
12 may consider whether nonrelative kin or other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the  
13 juvenile are willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe  
14 home. The court may order the department to notify the juvenile's State-recognized tribe of the  
15 need for nonsecure custody for the purpose of locating relatives or nonrelative kin for placement.  
16 The court may order placement of the juvenile with nonrelative kin if the court finds the  
17 placement is in the juvenile's best interests."

18 **SECTION 7.** G.S. 7B-906.1 reads as rewritten:

19 **"§ 7B-906.1. Review and permanency planning hearings.**

20 (a) The court shall conduct a review hearing within 90 days from the date of the initial  
21 dispositional hearing held pursuant to G.S. 7B-901 and shall conduct a review hearing within six  
22 months thereafter. ~~Within~~ It shall be the goal of the department to place infants under 3 years of  
23 age in a prospective permanent placement within 12 months of the date of the initial order  
24 removing custody. For all other juveniles older than 3 years of age, within 12 months of the date  
25 of the initial order removing custody, there shall be a review hearing designated as a permanency  
26 planning hearing. Review hearings after the initial permanency planning hearing shall be  
27 designated as subsequent permanency planning hearings. Subsequent permanency planning  
28 hearings shall be held at least every six months thereafter or earlier as set by the court to review  
29 the progress made in finalizing the permanent plan for the juvenile, or if necessary, to make a  
30 new permanent plan for the juvenile.

31 ...

32 (d) At each hearing, the court shall consider the following criteria and make written  
33 findings regarding those that are relevant:

34 ...

35 (3) Whether efforts to reunite the juvenile with either parent clearly would be  
36 unsuccessful or inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety and need for a  
37 safe, permanent home within a reasonable period of ~~time.~~ time, including  
38 whether a parent has engaged in any of the factors described under  
39 G.S. 7B-901(c). The court shall consider efforts to reunite regardless of  
40 whether the juvenile resided with the parent, guardian, or custodian at the time  
41 of removal. If the court determines efforts would be unsuccessful or  
42 inconsistent, the court shall schedule a permanency planning hearing within  
43 30 days to address the permanent plans in accordance with this section and  
44 G.S. 7B-906.2, unless the determination is made at a permanency planning  
45 hearing.

46 ...

47 (n) Notwithstanding other provisions of this Article, the court may waive the holding of  
48 hearings required by this section, may require written reports to the court by the agency or person  
49 holding custody in lieu of review hearings, or order that review hearings be held less often than  
50 every six months if the court finds by clear, cogent, and convincing evidence each of the  
51 following:

1           ...  
2           The court may not waive or refuse to conduct a ~~review-permanency planning~~ hearing if a  
3 party files a motion seeking the ~~review-hearing~~. However, if a guardian of the person has been  
4 appointed for the juvenile and the court has also made findings in accordance with subsection (n)  
5 of this section that guardianship is the permanent plan for the juvenile, the court shall proceed in  
6 accordance with G.S. 7B-600(b).

7           ...."

8           **SECTION 8.** G.S. 7B-905(b) reads as rewritten:

9           "(b) ~~A~~An initial dispositional order ~~under which a juvenile is removed from the custody~~  
10 ~~of a parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker~~ shall direct that the review hearing required by  
11 G.S. 7B-906.1 be held within 90 days from of the date of the initial dispositional hearing and, if  
12 practicable, shall set the date and time for the review hearing."

13           **SECTION 9.** G.S. 7B-906.2(b) reads as rewritten:

14           "(b) At any permanency planning hearing, the court shall adopt concurrent permanent  
15 plans and shall identify the primary plan and secondary plan. Reunification shall remain a  
16 primary or secondary plan unless the court makes or has made written findings under  
17 G.S. 7B-901(c) or makes written findings that reunification efforts clearly would be unsuccessful  
18 or would be inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety. The court shall order the county  
19 department of social services to make efforts toward finalizing the primary and secondary  
20 permanent plans and may specify efforts that are reasonable to timely achieve permanence for  
21 the juvenile."

22           **SECTION 10.** G.S. 7B-1103(a) is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

23           "(a) A petition or motion to terminate the parental rights of either or both parents to his,  
24 her, or their minor juvenile may only be filed by one or more of the following:

25           ...

26           (8) Any foster parent with whom the juvenile under 3 years of age has resided for  
27 a continuous period of at least nine months next preceding the filing of the  
28 petition or motion."

29           **SECTION 11.** This act becomes effective October 1, 2019, and applies to actions  
30 filed or pending on or after that date.