

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA

SESSION 1997

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HOUSE BILL 949  
Committee Substitute Favorable 4/29/97  
Committee Substitute #2 Favorable 7/21/97  
Committee Substitute #3 Favorable 8/4/97

Short Title: Improve Child Protection/Records.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

April 15, 1997

1 AN ACT TO IMPROVE CHILD PROTECTION BY ALLOWING DISCLOSURE OF  
2 CERTAIN RECORDS.

3 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

4 Section 1. Chapter 7A of the General Statutes is amended by adding the  
5 following new section to read:

6 **"§ 7A-675.1. Disclosure in child fatality or near fatality cases.**

7 (a) The following definitions apply in this section:

8 (1) 'Child fatality' means the death of a child from suspected abuse, neglect,  
9 or maltreatment.

10 (2) 'Near fatality' means a case in which a physician determines that a child  
11 is in serious or critical condition as the result of sickness or injury  
12 caused by suspected abuse, neglect, or maltreatment.

13 (3) 'Public agency' means any agency of State government or its  
14 subdivisions as defined in G.S. 132-1(a).

15 (4) 'Findings and information' means a written summary, as allowed by  
16 subsections (c) through (f) of this section, of actions taken or services  
17 rendered by a public agency following receipt of information that a

1 child might be in need of protection. The written summary shall include  
2 any of the following information the agency is able to provide:

3 a. The dates, outcomes, and results of any actions taken or services  
4 rendered.

5 b. The results of any review by the State Child Fatality Prevention  
6 Team, a local child fatality prevention team, a local community  
7 child protection team, the Child Fatality Task Force, or any  
8 public agency.

9 c. Confirmation of the receipt of all reports, accepted or not  
10 accepted by the county department of social services, for  
11 investigation of suspected child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment,  
12 including confirmation that investigations were conducted, the  
13 results of the investigations, a description of the conduct of the  
14 most recent investigation and the services rendered, and a  
15 statement of basis for the department's decision.

16 (b) Notwithstanding any other provision of law and subject to the provisions of  
17 subsections (c) through (f) of this section, a public agency shall disclose to the public,  
18 upon request, the findings and information related to a child fatality or near fatality if:

19 (1) A person is criminally charged with having caused the child fatality or  
20 near fatality; or

21 (2) The district attorney has certified that a person would be charged with  
22 having caused the child fatality or near fatality but for that person's prior  
23 death.

24 (c) Nothing herein shall be deemed to authorize access to the confidential records  
25 in the custody of a public agency, or the disclosure to the public of the substance or  
26 content of any psychiatric, psychological, or therapeutic evaluations or like materials or  
27 information pertaining to the child or the child's family unless directly related to the  
28 cause of the child fatality or near fatality, or the disclosure of information that would  
29 reveal the identities of persons who provided information related to the suspected abuse,  
30 neglect, or maltreatment of the child.

31 (d) Within five working days from the receipt of a request for findings and  
32 information related to a child fatality or near fatality, a public agency shall consult with  
33 the appropriate district attorney and provide the findings and information unless the  
34 agency has a reasonable belief that release of the information:

35 (1) Is not authorized by subsections (a) and (b) of this section;

36 (2) Is likely to cause mental or physical harm or danger to a minor child  
37 residing in the deceased or injured child's household;

38 (3) Is likely to jeopardize the State's ability to prosecute the defendant;

39 (4) Is likely to jeopardize the defendant's right to a fair trial;

40 (5) Is likely to undermine an ongoing or future criminal investigation; or

41 (6) Is not authorized by federal law and regulations.

42 (e) Any person whose request is denied may apply to the appropriate superior  
43 court for an order compelling disclosure of the findings and information of the public

1 agency. The application shall set forth, with reasonable particularity, factors supporting  
2 the application. The superior court shall have jurisdiction to issue such orders. Actions  
3 brought pursuant to this section shall be set down for immediate hearing, and subsequent  
4 proceedings in such actions shall be accorded priority by the appellate courts. After the  
5 court has reviewed the specific findings and information, in camera, the court shall issue  
6 an order compelling disclosure unless the court finds that one or more of the  
7 circumstances in subsection (d) of this section exist.

8 (f) Access to criminal investigative reports and criminal intelligence information  
9 of public law enforcement agencies, and confidential information in the possession of the  
10 State Child Fatality Prevention Team, the local teams, and the Child Fatality Task Force,  
11 shall be governed by G.S. 132-1.4 and G.S. 143-578 respectively. Nothing herein shall  
12 be deemed to require the disclosure or release of any information in the possession of a  
13 district attorney.

14 (g) Any public agency or its employees acting in good faith in disclosing or  
15 declining to disclose information pursuant to this section shall be immune from any  
16 criminal or civil liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed for such action.

17 (h) Nothing herein shall be deemed to narrow or limit the definition of 'public  
18 records' as set forth in G.S. 132-1(a)."

19 Section 2. G.S. 7A-675(h) reads as rewritten:

20 "(h) ~~Nothing in this section shall preclude the necessary sharing of information among~~  
21 ~~authorized agencies.~~The chief district court judge in each district shall designate by  
22 standing order certain agencies in the district as 'agencies authorized to share  
23 information'. Agencies so designated shall share with one another, upon request,  
24 information that is in their possession that is relevant to any case in which a petition is  
25 filed alleging that a juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent, and shall continue to do  
26 so until the juvenile is no longer subject to the juvenile jurisdiction of the court.  
27 Agencies that may be designated as 'agencies authorized to share information' include  
28 local mental health facilities, local health departments, local departments of social  
29 services, local law enforcement agencies, local school administrative units, the district's  
30 district attorney's office, the Division of Juvenile Services of the Administrative Office of  
31 the Courts, and the Office of Guardian ad Litem Services of the Administrative Office of  
32 the Courts. Any information shared among agencies pursuant to this subsection shall  
33 remain confidential, shall be withheld from public inspection, and shall be used only for  
34 the protection of the juvenile. Nothing in this section or any other provision of law shall  
35 preclude any other necessary sharing of information among agencies."

36 Section 3. Funds appropriated in Senate Bill 352, 5th edition, to the  
37 Department of Human Resources, Division of Social Services, for child welfare system  
38 improvements shall be used to implement the provisions of this act.

39 Section 4. Sections 1 and 2 of this act become effective October 1, 1997. The  
40 remainder of this act is effective upon becoming law.