

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2011

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HOUSE BILL 589

Short Title: Divorce/DVPO/Child Support Changes. (Public)

Sponsors: Representative Stevens (Primary Sponsor).
For a complete list of Sponsors, see Bill Information on the NCGA Web Site.

Referred to: Judiciary Subcommittee B.

April 5, 2011

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ELIMINATE THE PROVISION OF LAW THAT STATES ALLEGATIONS IN
A DIVORCE COMPLAINT ARE DEEMED DENIED REGARDLESS OF WHETHER
THE DEFENDANT FILES A PLEADING DENYING THE ALLEGATIONS, AND TO
AMEND THE LAWS RELATING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTIVE
ORDERS, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA BAR ASSOCIATION;
AND TO PROVIDE FOR TERMINATION OF CHILD SUPPORT WHEN A CHILD IS
ENROLLED IN AN EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 50-10 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 50-10. Material facts found by judge or jury in divorce or annulment proceedings;
when notice of trial not required; procedure same as ordinary civil actions.**

(a) Except as provided for in subsection (e) of this section, the material facts in every
complaint asking for a ~~divorce or for an~~ annulment shall be deemed to be denied by the
defendant, whether the same shall be actually denied by pleading or not, and no judgment shall
be given in favor of the plaintiff in any such complaint until such facts have been found by a
judge or jury.

(b) Nothing herein shall require notice of trial to be given to a defendant who has not
made an appearance in the action.

(c) The determination of whether there is to be a jury trial or a trial before the judge
without a jury shall be made in accordance with G.S. 1A-1, Rules 38 and 39.

(d) The provisions of G.S. 1A-1, Rule 56, shall be applicable to actions for absolute
divorce pursuant to G.S. 50-6, for the purpose of determining whether any genuine issue of
material fact remains for trial by jury, but in the event the court determines that no genuine
issue of material fact remains for trial by jury, the court must find the facts as provided herein.
The court may enter a judgment of absolute divorce pursuant to the procedures set forth in
G.S. 1A-1, Rule 56, finding all requisite facts from nontestimonial evidence presented by
affidavit, verified motion or other verified pleading.

(e) The clerk of superior court, upon request of the plaintiff, may enter judgment in
cases in which the plaintiff's only claim against the defendant is for absolute divorce, or
absolute divorce and the resumption of a former name, and the defendant has been defaulted for
failure to appear, the defendant has answered admitting the allegations of the complaint, or the
defendant has filed a waiver of the right to answer, and the defendant is not an infant or
incompetent person."

SECTION 2. G.S. 50B-2(c) reads as rewritten:



1 "(c) Ex Parte Orders. – Prior to the hearing, if it clearly appears to the court from
2 specific facts shown, that there is a danger of acts of domestic violence against the aggrieved
3 party or a minor child, the court may enter orders as it deems necessary to protect the aggrieved
4 party or minor children from those acts provided, however, that a temporary order for custody
5 ex parte and prior to service of process and notice shall not be entered unless the court finds
6 that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse. If
7 the court finds that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or
8 sexual abuse, upon request of the aggrieved party, the court shall consider and may order the
9 other party to stay away from a minor child, or to return a minor child to, or not remove a
10 minor child from, the physical care of a parent or person in loco parentis, if the court finds that
11 the order is in the best interest of the minor child and is necessary for the safety of the minor
12 child. If the court determines that it is in the best interest of the minor child for the other party
13 to have contact with the minor child or children, the court shall issue an order designed to
14 protect the safety and well-being of the minor child and the aggrieved party. The order shall
15 specify the terms of contact between the other party and the minor child and may include a
16 specific schedule of time and location of exchange of the minor child, supervision by a third
17 party or supervised visitation center, and any other conditions that will ensure both the
18 well-being of the minor child and the aggrieved party. The court may not grant possession of
19 the residence to the aggrieved party to the exclusion of the other party absent a finding in the ex
20 parte order that the other party has attempted to cause, or has intentionally caused, bodily injury
21 to the aggrieved party or a minor child, has placed the aggrieved party or a minor child in fear
22 of imminent serious bodily injury, or has committed any act defined in G.S. 14-27.2 through
23 G.S. 14-27.7 against the aggrieved party or a minor child. Upon the issuance of an ex parte
24 order under this subsection, a hearing shall be held within 10 days from the date of issuance of
25 the order or within seven days from the date of service of process on the other party, whichever
26 occurs later. Once the other party has been served, if the court does not hold the hearing within
27 10 days from the date of the issuance of the order or within seven days from the date of service
28 of process on the other party, whichever occurs later, then the ex parte order shall expire unless
29 the other party consents to scheduling the hearing at a later time. If an aggrieved party acting
30 pro se requests ex parte relief, the clerk of superior court shall schedule an ex parte hearing
31 with the district court division of the General Court of Justice within 72 hours of the filing for
32 said relief, or by the end of the next day on which the district court is in session in the county in
33 which the action was filed, whichever shall first occur. If the district court is not in session in
34 said county, the aggrieved party may contact the clerk of superior court in any other county
35 within the same judicial district who shall schedule an ex parte hearing with the district court
36 division of the General Court of Justice by the end of the next day on which said court division
37 is in session in that county. Upon the issuance of an ex parte order under this subsection, if the
38 party is proceeding pro se, the Clerk shall set a date for hearing and issue a notice of hearing
39 within the time periods provided in this subsection, and shall effect service of the summons,
40 complaint, notice, order and other papers through the appropriate law enforcement agency
41 where the defendant is to be served."

42 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 50-13.4(c) reads as rewritten:

43 "(c) Payments ordered for the support of a minor child shall be in such amount as to
44 meet the reasonable needs of the child for health, education, and maintenance, having due
45 regard to the estates, earnings, conditions, accustomed standard of living of the child and the
46 parties, the child care and homemaker contributions of each party, and other facts of the
47 particular case. Payments ordered for the support of a minor child shall be on a monthly basis,
48 due and payable on the first day of each month. The requirement that orders be established on a
49 monthly basis does not affect the availability of garnishment of disposable earnings based on an
50 obligor's pay period.

1 The court shall determine the amount of child support payments by applying the
2 presumptive guidelines established pursuant to subsection (c1) of this section. However, upon
3 request of any party, the Court shall hear evidence, and from the evidence, find the facts
4 relating to the reasonable needs of the child for support and the relative ability of each parent to
5 provide support. If, after considering the evidence, the Court finds by the greater weight of the
6 evidence that the application of the guidelines would not meet or would exceed the reasonable
7 needs of the child considering the relative ability of each parent to provide support or would be
8 otherwise unjust or inappropriate the Court may vary from the guidelines. If the court orders an
9 amount other than the amount determined by application of the presumptive guidelines, the
10 court shall make findings of fact as to the criteria that justify varying from the guidelines and
11 the basis for the amount ordered.

12 Payments ordered for the support of a child shall terminate when the child reaches the age
13 of 18 except:

- 14 (1) If the child is otherwise emancipated, payments shall terminate at that time;
- 15 (2) If the child is still in primary or secondary school when the child reaches age
16 18, support payments shall continue until the child graduates, otherwise
17 ceases to attend school on a regular basis, fails to make satisfactory
18 academic progress towards graduation, or reaches age 20, whichever comes
19 first, unless the court in its discretion orders that payments cease at age 18 or
20 prior to high school graduation.
- 21 (3) If the child is enrolled in a cooperative innovative high school program
22 authorized under Part 9 of Article 16 of Chapter 115C of the General
23 Statutes, then payments shall terminate when the child completes his or her
24 fourth year of enrollment or when the child reaches the age of 18, whichever
25 occurs first.

26 In the case of graduation, or attaining age 20, payments shall terminate without order by the
27 court, subject to the right of the party receiving support to show, upon motion and with notice
28 to the opposing party, that the child has not graduated or attained the age of 20.

29 If an arrearage for child support or fees due exists at the time that a child support obligation
30 terminates, payments shall continue in the same total amount that was due under the terms of
31 the previous court order or income withholding in effect at the time of the support obligation.
32 The total amount of these payments is to be applied to the arrearage until all arrearages and fees
33 are satisfied or until further order of the court."

34 **SECTION 4.** This act is effective when it becomes law and applies to actions filed
35 on or after that date.