

Article 5.

Jurisdiction.

**§ 7A-25. Original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.**

The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction to hear claims against the State, but its decisions shall be merely recommendatory; no process in the nature of execution shall issue thereon; the decisions shall be reported to the next session of the General Assembly for its action. The court shall by rule prescribe the procedures to be followed in the proper exercise of the jurisdiction conferred by this section. (1967, c. 108, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-26. Appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals.**

The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals respectively have jurisdiction to review upon appeal decisions of the several courts of the General Court of Justice and of administrative agencies, upon matters of law or legal inference, in accordance with the system of appeals provided in this Article. (1967, c. 108, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-27. Appeals of right from the courts of the trial divisions.**

- (a) Appeal lies of right directly to the Supreme Court in any of the following cases:
- (1) All cases in which the defendant is convicted of murder in the first degree and the judgment of the superior court includes a sentence of death.
  - (2) From any final judgment in a case designated as a mandatory complex business case pursuant to G.S. 7A-45.4 or designated as a discretionary complex business case pursuant to Rule 2.1 of the General Rules of Practice for the Superior and District Courts.
  - (3) From any interlocutory order of a Business Court Judge that does any of the following:
    - a. Affects a substantial right.
    - b. In effect determines the action and prevents a judgment from which an appeal might be taken.
    - c. Discontinues the action.
    - d. Grants or refuses a new trial.
  - (4) Any trial court's decision regarding class action certification under G.S. 1A-1, Rule 23.
  - (5) Repealed by Session Laws 2021-18, s. 1, effective July 1, 2021, and applicable to appeals filed on or after that date.
- (a1) Repealed by Session Laws 2016-125, s. 22(b), 4th Ex. Sess., effective December 1, 2016.
- (b) Except as provided in subsection (a) of this section, appeal lies of right directly to the Court of Appeals in any of the following cases:
- (1) From any final judgment of a superior court, other than one based on a plea of guilty or nolo contendere, including any final judgment entered upon review of a decision of an administrative agency, except for a final judgment entered upon review of a court martial under G.S. 127A-62.
  - (2) From any final judgment of a district court in a civil action.
  - (3) From any interlocutory order or judgment of a superior court or district court in a civil action or proceeding that does any of the following:
    - a. Affects a substantial right.

- b. In effect determines the action and prevents a judgment from which an appeal might be taken.
- c. Discontinues the action.
- d. Grants or refuses a new trial.
- e. Determines a claim prosecuted under G.S. 50-19.1.
- f. Grants temporary injunctive relief restraining the State or a political subdivision of the State from enforcing the operation or execution of an act of the General Assembly. This sub-subdivision only applies where the State or a political subdivision of the State is a party in the civil action.

(4) From any other order or judgment of the superior court from which an appeal is authorized by statute.

(c) through (e) Repealed by Session Laws 2013-411, s. 1, effective August 23, 2013. (1967, c. 108, s. 1; 1971, c. 377, s. 3; 1973, c. 704; 1977, c. 711, s. 4; 1987, c. 679; 1995, c. 204, s. 1; 2010-193, s. 17; 2013-411, s. 1; 2014-100, s. 18B.16(e); 2014-102, s. 1; 2015-264, s. 1(b); 2016-125, 4th Ex. Sess., s. 22(b); 2017-7, s. 2; 2021-18, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-28. Decisions of Court of Appeals on post-trial motions for appropriate relief, valuation of exempt property, or courts-martial are final.**

(a) Decisions of the Court of Appeals upon review of motions for appropriate relief listed in G.S. 15A-1415(b) are final and not subject to further review in the Supreme Court by appeal, motion, certification, writ, or otherwise.

(b) Decisions of the Court of Appeals upon review of valuation of exempt property under G.S. 1C are final and not subject to further review in the Supreme Court by appeal, motion, certification, writ, or otherwise.

(c) Decisions of the Court of Appeals upon review of courts-martial under G.S. 127A-62 are final and not subject to further review in the Supreme Court by appeal, motion, certification, writ, or otherwise. (1981, c. 470, s. 1; 1981 (Reg. Sess., 1982), c. 1224, s. 16.; 2010-193, s. 18.)

**§ 7A-29. Appeals of right from certain administrative agencies.**

(a) From any final order or decision of the North Carolina Utilities Commission not governed by subsection (b) of this section, the Department of Health and Human Services under G.S. 131E-188(b), the North Carolina Industrial Commission, the North Carolina State Bar under G.S. 84-28, the Property Tax Commission under G.S. 105-290 and G.S. 105-342, the Commissioner of Insurance under G.S. 58-2-80, the State Board of Elections under G.S. 163-127.6, the Office of Administrative Hearings under G.S. 126-34.02, or the Secretary of Environmental Quality under G.S. 104E-6.2 or G.S. 130A-293, appeal as of right lies directly to the Court of Appeals.

(b) From any final order or decision of the Utilities Commission in a general rate case, appeal as of right lies directly to the Supreme Court. (1967, c. 108, s. 1; 1971, c. 703, s. 5; 1975, c. 582, s. 12; 1979, c. 584, s. 1; 1981, c. 704, s. 28; 1983, c. 526, s. 1; c. 761, s. 188; 1983 (Reg. Sess., 1984), c. 1000, s. 2; c. 1087, s. 2; c. 1113, s. 2; 1985, c. 462, s. 3; 1987, c. 850, s. 2; 1991, c. 546, s. 2; c. 679, s. 2; 1993, c. 501, s. 2; 1995, c. 115, s. 1; c. 504, s. 2; c. 509, s. 2; 1997-443, ss. 11A.118(a), 11A.119(a); 2003-63, s. 1; 2006-155, s. 1.1; 2013-382, s. 6.4; 2015-241, s. 14.30(v); 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 6.1.)

**§ 7A-30. Appeals of right from certain decisions of the Court of Appeals.**

Except as provided in G.S. 7A-28, an appeal lies of right to the Supreme Court from any decision of the Court of Appeals rendered in a case:

- (1) Which directly involves a substantial question arising under the Constitution of the United States or of this State, or
- (2) In which there is a dissent when the Court of Appeals is sitting in a panel of three judges. An appeal of right pursuant to this subdivision is not effective until after the Court of Appeals sitting en banc has rendered a decision in the case, if the Court of Appeals hears the case en banc, or until after the time for filing a motion for rehearing of the cause by the Court of Appeals has expired or the Court of Appeals has denied the motion for rehearing. (1967, c. 108, s. 1; 1983, c. 526, s. 2; 2016-125, 4th Ex. Sess., s. 22(c).)

**§ 7A-31. Discretionary review by the Supreme Court.**

(a) In any cause in which appeal is taken to the Court of Appeals, including any cause heard while the Court of Appeals was sitting en banc, except a cause appealed from the North Carolina Industrial Commission, the North Carolina State Bar pursuant to G.S. 84-28, the Property Tax Commission pursuant to G.S. 105-345, the Board of State Contract Appeals pursuant to G.S. 143-135.9, the Commissioner of Insurance pursuant to G.S. 58-2-80 or G.S. 58-65-131(c), a court-martial pursuant to G.S. 127A-62, a motion for appropriate relief, or valuation of exempt property pursuant to G.S. 7A-28, the Supreme Court may, in its discretion, on motion of any party to the cause or on its own motion, certify the cause for review by the Supreme Court, either before or after it has been determined by the Court of Appeals. A cause appealed to the Court of Appeals from any of the administrative bodies listed in the preceding sentence may be certified in similar fashion, but only after determination of the cause in the Court of Appeals. The effect of such certification is to transfer the cause from the Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court for review by the Supreme Court. If the cause is certified for transfer to the Supreme Court before its determination in the Court of Appeals, review is not had in the Court of Appeals but the cause is forthwith transferred for review in the first instance by the Supreme Court. If the cause is certified for transfer to the Supreme Court after its determination by the Court of Appeals, the Supreme Court reviews the decision of the Court of Appeals.

Except in courts-martial and motions within the purview of G.S. 7A-28, the State may move for certification for review of any criminal cause, but only after determination of the cause by the Court of Appeals.

(b) In causes subject to certification under subsection (a) of this section, certification may be made by the Supreme Court before determination of the cause by the Court of Appeals when in the opinion of the Supreme Court any of the following apply:

- (1) The subject matter of the appeal has significant public interest.
- (2) The cause involves legal principles of major significance to the jurisprudence of the State.
- (3) Delay in final adjudication is likely to result from failure to certify and thereby cause substantial harm.
- (4) The work load of the courts of the appellate division is such that the expeditious administration of justice requires certification.
- (5) The subject matter of the appeal is important in overseeing the jurisdiction and integrity of the court system.

(c) In causes subject to certification under subsection (a) of this section, certification may be made by the Supreme Court after determination of the cause by the Court of Appeals when in the opinion of the Supreme Court any of the following apply:

- (1) The subject matter of the appeal has significant public interest.
- (2) The cause involves legal principles of major significance to the jurisprudence of the State.
- (3) The decision of the Court of Appeals appears likely to be in conflict with a decision of the Supreme Court.

Interlocutory determinations by the Court of Appeals, including orders remanding the cause for a new trial or for other proceedings, shall be certified for review by the Supreme Court only upon a determination by the Supreme Court that failure to certify would cause a delay in final adjudication which would probably result in substantial harm.

(d) The procedure for certification by the Supreme Court on its own motion, or upon petition of a party, shall be prescribed by rule of the Supreme Court. (1967, c. 108, s. 1; 1969, c. 1044; 1975, c. 555; 1977, c. 711, s. 5; 1981, c. 470, s. 2; 1981 (Reg. Sess., 1982), c. 1224, s. 17; c. 1253, s. 1; 1983, c. 526, s. 3; c. 761, s. 189; 2010-193, s. 19; 2016-125, 4th Ex. Sess., s. 22(d); 2017-7, s. 3.)

#### **§ 7A-31.1. Discretionary Review by the Court of Appeals.**

(a) In the case of a court-martial in which appeal is taken to the Wake County Superior Court under G.S. 127A-62, the Court of Appeals may, in its discretion, on motion of any party to the cause or on its own motion, certify the cause for review by the Court of Appeals after it has been reviewed by the Wake County Superior Court. The effect of such certification is to transfer the cause from the Wake County Superior Court to the Court of Appeals, and the Court of Appeals reviews the decision by the Wake County Superior Court.

(b) In causes subject to certification under subsection (a) of this section, certification may be made by the Court of Appeals after determination of the cause by the Wake County Superior Court when in the opinion of the Court of Appeals:

- (1) The subject matter of the appeal has significant public interest, or
- (2) The cause involves legal principles of major significance to the jurisprudence of the State, or
- (3) The decision of the Wake County Superior Court appears likely to be in conflict with a decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces.

Interlocutory determinations by the Wake County Superior Court, including orders remanding the cause for a new trial or for other proceedings, shall be certified for review by the Court of Appeals only upon a determination by the Court of Appeals that failure to certify would cause a delay in final adjudication which would probably result in substantial harm.

(c) Any rules for practice and procedure for review of courts-martial that may be required shall be prescribed pursuant to G.S. 7A-33. (2010-193, s. 20.)

#### **§ 7A-32. Power of Supreme Court and Court of Appeals to issue remedial writs.**

(a) The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals have jurisdiction, exercisable by any one of the justices or judges of the respective courts, to issue the writ of habeas corpus upon the application of any person described in G.S. 17-3, according to the practice and procedure provided therefor in chapter 17 of the General Statutes, and to rule of the Supreme Court.

(b) The Supreme Court has jurisdiction, exercisable by one justice or by such number of justices as the court may by rule provide, to issue the prerogative writs, including mandamus,

prohibition, certiorari, and supersedeas, in aid of its own jurisdiction or in exercise of its general power to supervise and control the proceedings of any of the other courts of the General Court of Justice. The practice and procedure shall be as provided by statute or rule of the Supreme Court, or, in the absence of statute or rule, according to the practice and procedure of the common law.

(c) The Court of Appeals has jurisdiction, exercisable by one judge or by such number of judges as the Supreme Court may by rule provide, to issue the prerogative writs, including mandamus, prohibition, certiorari, and supersedeas, in aid of its own jurisdiction, or to supervise and control the proceedings of any of the trial courts of the General Court of Justice, and of the Utilities Commission and the Industrial Commission. The practice and procedure shall be as provided by statute or rule of the Supreme Court, or, in the absence of statute or rule, according to the practice and procedure of the common law. (1967, c. 108, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-33. Supreme Court to prescribe appellate division rules of practice and procedure.**

The Supreme Court shall prescribe rules of practice and procedure designed to procure the expeditious and inexpensive disposition of all litigation in the appellate division. (1967, c. 108, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-34. Rules of practice and procedure in trial courts.**

The Supreme Court is hereby authorized to prescribe rules of practice and procedure for the superior and district courts supplementary to, and not inconsistent with, acts of the General Assembly. (1967, c. 108, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-34.1:** Repealed by Session Laws 2011-145, s. 31.23(f), effective July 1, 2011.

**§ 7A-35. Repealed by Session Laws 1971, c. 377, s. 32.**

**§ 7A-36. Repealed by Session Laws 1969, c. 1190, s. 57.**

**§ 7A-37: Repealed by Session Laws 1993, c. 553, s. 1.**

**§ 7A-37.1. Statewide court-ordered, nonbinding arbitration in certain civil actions.**

(a) The General Assembly finds that court-ordered, nonbinding arbitration may be a more economical, efficient and satisfactory procedure to resolve certain civil actions than by traditional civil litigation and therefore authorizes court-ordered nonbinding arbitration as an alternative civil procedure, subject to these provisions.

(b) The Supreme Court of North Carolina may adopt rules governing this procedure and may supervise its implementation and operation through the Administrative Office of the Courts. These rules shall ensure that no party is deprived of the right to jury trial and that any party dissatisfied with an arbitration award may have trial de novo.

(c) Except as otherwise provided in rules promulgated by the Supreme Court of North Carolina pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, this procedure shall be employed in all civil actions in district court, unless all parties to the action waive arbitration under this section.

(c1) Except as provided in subsection (c2) of this section, in cases referred to nonbinding arbitration as provided in this section, a fee of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) shall be assessed per arbitration, to be divided equally among the parties, to cover the cost of providing arbitrators. Fees

assessed under this section shall be paid to the clerk of superior court in the county where the case was filed and remitted by the clerk to the State Treasurer.

(c2) In appeals in small claims actions under Article 19 of Chapter 7A of the General Statutes, if (i) the arbitrator finds in favor of the appellee, (ii) the arbitrator's decision is appealed for trial de novo under G.S. 7A-229, and (iii) the arbitrator's decision is affirmed on appeal, then the court shall consider the fact that the arbitrator's decision was affirmed as a significant factor in favor of assessing all court costs and attorneys' fees associated with the case in both the original action and the two appeals, including the arbitration fee assessed under subsection (c1) of this section, against the appellant.

(d) This procedure may be implemented in a judicial district, in selected counties within a district, or in any court within a district, if the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the cognizant Senior Resident Superior Court Judge or the Chief District Court Judge of any court selected for this procedure, determine that use of this procedure may assist in the administration of justice toward achieving objectives stated in subsection (a) of this section in a judicial district, county, or court. The Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, acting upon the recommendation of the cognizant Senior Resident Superior Court Judge or Chief District Court Judge of any court selected for this procedure, may terminate this procedure in any judicial district, county, or court upon a determination that its use has not accomplished objectives stated in subsection (a) of this section.

(e) Arbitrators in this procedure shall have the same immunity as judges from civil liability for their official conduct. (1989, c. 301, s. 1; 2002-126, s. 14.3(a); 2003-284, s. 36A.1; 2013-159, s. 3; 2013-225, s. 1.)

### **§ 7A-38: Repealed by Session Laws 1995, c. 500, s. 3.**

#### **§ 7A-38.1. Mediated settlement conferences in superior court civil actions.**

(a) Purpose. – The General Assembly finds that a system of court-ordered mediated settlement conferences should be established to facilitate the settlement of superior court civil actions and to make civil litigation more economical, efficient, and satisfactory to litigants and the State. Therefore, this section is enacted to require parties to superior court civil actions and their representatives to attend a pretrial, mediated settlement conference conducted pursuant to this section and pursuant to rules of the Supreme Court adopted to implement this section.

(b) Definitions. – As used in this section:

- (1) "Mediated settlement conference" means a pretrial, court-ordered conference of the parties to a civil action and their representatives conducted by a mediator.
- (2) "Mediation" means an informal process conducted by a mediator with the objective of helping parties voluntarily settle their dispute.
- (3) "Mediator" means a neutral person who acts to encourage and facilitate a resolution of a pending civil action. A mediator does not make an award or render a judgment as to the merits of the action.

(c) Rules of procedure. – The Supreme Court may adopt rules to implement this section.

(d) Statewide implementation. – Mediated settlement conferences authorized by this section shall be implemented in all judicial districts as soon as practicable, as determined by the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

(e) Cases selected for mediated settlement conferences. – The senior resident superior court judge of any participating district may order a mediated settlement conference for any

superior court civil action pending in the district. The senior resident superior court judge may by local rule order all cases, not otherwise exempted by the Supreme Court rule, to mediated settlement conference.

(f) Attendance of parties. – The parties to a superior court civil action in which a mediated settlement conference is ordered, their attorneys and other persons or entities with authority, by law or by contract, to settle the parties' claims shall attend the mediated settlement conference unless excused by rules of the Supreme Court or by order of the senior resident superior court judge. Nothing in this section shall require any party or other participant in the conference to make a settlement offer or demand which it deems is contrary to its best interests.

(g) Sanctions. – Any person required to attend a mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure under this section who, without good cause, fails to attend or fails to pay any or all of the mediator's or other neutral's fee in compliance with this section and the rules promulgated by the Supreme Court to implement this section is subject to the contempt powers of the court and monetary sanctions imposed by a resident or presiding superior court judge. The monetary sanctions may include the payment of fines, attorneys' fees, mediator and neutral fees, and the expenses and loss of earnings incurred by persons attending the procedure. A party seeking sanctions against another party or person shall do so in a written motion stating the grounds for the motion and the relief sought. The motion shall be served upon all parties and upon any person against whom the sanctions are being sought. The court may initiate sanction proceedings upon its own motion by the entry of a show cause order. If the court imposes sanctions, it shall do so, after notice and a hearing, in a written order, making findings of fact and conclusions of law. An order imposing sanctions shall be reviewable upon appeal where the entire record as submitted shall be reviewed to determine whether the order is supported by substantial evidence.

(h) Selection of mediator. – The parties to a superior court civil action in which a mediated settlement conference is to be held pursuant to this section shall have the right to designate a mediator. Upon failure of the parties to designate a mediator within the time established by the rules of the Supreme Court, a mediator shall be appointed by the senior resident superior court judge.

(i) Promotion of other settlement procedures. – Nothing in this section is intended to preclude the use of other dispute resolution methods within the superior court. Parties to a superior court civil action are encouraged to select other available dispute resolution methods. The senior resident superior court judge, at the request of and with the consent of the parties, may order the parties to attend and participate in any other settlement procedure authorized by rules of the Supreme Court or by the local superior court rules, in lieu of attending a mediated settlement conference. Neutral third parties acting pursuant to this section shall be selected and compensated in accordance with such rules or pursuant to agreement of the parties. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the parties from participating in, or the court from ordering, other dispute resolution procedures, including arbitration to the extent authorized under State or federal law.

(j) Immunity. – Mediator and other neutrals acting pursuant to this section shall have judicial immunity in the same manner and to the same extent as a judge of the General Court of Justice, except that mediators and other neutrals may be disciplined in accordance with enforcement procedures adopted by the Supreme Court pursuant to G.S. 7A-38.2.

(k) Costs of mediated settlement conference. – Costs of mediated settlement conferences shall be borne by the parties. Unless otherwise ordered by the court or agreed to by the parties, the mediator's fees shall be paid in equal shares by the parties. For purposes of this section, multiple parties shall be considered one party when they are represented by the same counsel. The rules

adopted by the Supreme Court implementing this section shall set out a method whereby parties found by the court to be unable to pay the costs of the mediated settlement conference are afforded an opportunity to participate without cost. The rules adopted by the Supreme Court shall set the fees to be paid a mediator appointed by a judge upon the failure of the parties to designate a mediator.

(l) Inadmissibility of negotiations. – Evidence of statements made and conduct occurring in a mediated settlement conference or other settlement proceeding conducted under this section, whether attributable to a party, the mediator, other neutral, or a neutral observer present at the settlement proceeding, shall not be subject to discovery and shall be inadmissible in any proceeding in the action or other civil actions on the same claim, except:

- (1) In proceedings for sanctions under this section;
- (2) In proceedings to enforce or rescind a settlement of the action;
- (3) In disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission; or
- (4) In proceedings to enforce laws concerning juvenile or elder abuse.

As used in this section, the term "neutral observer" includes persons seeking mediator certification, persons studying dispute resolution processes, and persons acting as interpreters.

No settlement agreement to resolve any or all issues reached at the proceeding conducted under this subsection or during its recesses shall be enforceable unless it has been reduced to writing and signed by the parties against whom enforcement is sought or signed by their designees. No evidence otherwise discoverable shall be inadmissible merely because it is presented or discussed in a mediated settlement conference or other settlement proceeding.

No mediator, other neutral, or neutral observer present at a settlement proceeding shall be compelled to testify or produce evidence concerning statements made and conduct occurring in anticipation of, during, or as a follow-up to a mediated settlement conference or other settlement proceeding pursuant to this section in any civil proceeding for any purpose, including proceedings to enforce or rescind a settlement of the action, except to attest to the signing of any agreements, and except proceedings for sanctions under this section, disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission, and proceedings to enforce laws concerning juvenile or elder abuse.

(m) Right to jury trial. – Nothing in this section or the rules adopted by the Supreme Court implementing this section shall restrict the right to jury trial. (1995, c. 500, s. 1; 1999-354, s. 5; 2005-167, s. 1; 2008-194, s. 8(a); 2015-57, s. 1; 2017-158, s. 26.7(a); 2021-47, s. 12(a).)

### **§ 7A-38.2. Regulation of mediators and other neutrals.**

(a) The Supreme Court may adopt standards of conduct for mediators and other neutrals who are certified or otherwise qualified pursuant to G.S. 7A-38.1, 7A-38.3, 7A-38.3B, 7A-38.3D, 7A-38.3E, and 7A-38.4A, or who participate in proceedings conducted pursuant to those sections. The standards may also regulate mediator and other neutral training programs. The Supreme Court may adopt procedures for the enforcement of those standards.

(b) The administration of the certification and qualification of mediators and other neutrals, and mediator and other neutral training programs shall be conducted through the Dispute Resolution Commission, established under the Judicial Department. The Supreme Court shall adopt rules and regulations governing the operation of the Commission. The Commission shall exercise all of its duties independently of the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts,

except that the Commission shall consult with the Director regarding personnel and budgeting matters.

(c) The Dispute Resolution Commission shall consist of 18 members: five judges appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, at least two of whom shall be active superior court judges, and at least two of whom shall be active district court judges; one clerk of superior court appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; two mediators certified to conduct superior court mediated settlement conferences and two mediators certified to conduct equitable distribution mediated settlement conferences appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; one certified district criminal court mediator who is a representative of a community mediation center appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; a district attorney appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; a court management staff member appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; two practicing attorneys who are not certified as mediators appointed by the President of the North Carolina State Bar, one of whom shall be a family law specialist; and three citizens knowledgeable about mediation, one of whom shall be appointed by the Governor, one by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives in accordance with G.S. 120-121, and one by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate in accordance with G.S. 120-121. Commission members shall serve three-year terms and shall be ineligible to serve more than two consecutive terms. Members appointed to fill unexpired terms shall be eligible to serve two consecutive terms upon the expiration of the unexpired term. The Chief Justice shall designate one of the members to serve as chair for a two-year term. Members of the Commission shall be compensated pursuant to G.S. 138-5.

Vacancies shall be filled for unexpired terms and full terms in the same manner as incumbents were appointed. Appointing authorities may receive and consider suggestions and recommendations of persons for appointment from the Dispute Resolution Commission, the Family Law, Litigation, and Dispute Resolution Sections of the North Carolina Bar Association, the North Carolina Association of Professional Family Mediators, the North Carolina Conference of Clerks of Superior Court, the North Carolina Conference of Court Administrators, the Mediation Network of North Carolina, the Dispute Resolution Committee of the Supreme Court, the Conference of Chief District Court Judges, the Conference of Superior Court Judges, the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Child Custody Mediation Advisory Committee of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

(d) An administrative fee, not to exceed two hundred dollars (\$200.00) per certification, may be charged by the Dispute Resolution Commission to applicants for certification and annual renewal of certification for mediators and mediation training programs operating under this Article. The fees collected shall be deposited in a Dispute Resolution Fund. The Fund shall be established within the Judicial Department as a nonreverting, interest-bearing special revenue account. Accordingly, interest and other investment income earned by the Fund shall be credited to it. All moneys collected through the fees authorized and assessed under this statute shall be remitted to the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used to support the operations of the Commission and used at the direction of the Commission.

(e) The chair of the Commission may employ an executive director and other staff as necessary to assist the Commission in carrying out its duties. The chair may also employ special counsel or call upon the Attorney General to furnish counsel to assist the Commission in conducting hearings pursuant to its certification or qualification and regulatory responsibilities. Special counsel or counsel furnished by the Attorney General may present the evidence in support

of a denial or revocation of certification or qualification or a complaint against a mediator, other neutral, training program, or trainers or staff affiliated with a program. Special counsel or counsel furnished by the Attorney General may also represent the Commission when its final determinations are the subject of an appeal.

(f) In connection with any investigation or hearing conducted pursuant to an application for certification or qualification of any mediator, other neutral, or training program, or conducted pursuant to any disciplinary matter, the chair of the Dispute Resolution Commission or the chair's designee, may do any of the following:

- (1) Administer oaths and affirmations.
- (2) Sign and issue subpoenas in the name of the Dispute Resolution Commission or direct its executive director to issue such subpoenas on its behalf requiring attendance and the giving of testimony by witnesses and the production of books, papers, and other documentary evidence.
- (3) Apply to the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division, for any order necessary to enforce the powers conferred in this section, including an order for injunctive relief pursuant to G.S. 1A-1, Rule 65, when a certified mediator's conduct necessitates prompt action.
- (4) Assess and collect an administrative fee from any person who appeals an adverse determination to the full Commission for a hearing and fails to attend the hearing without good cause as determined by the chair of the Commission. The fee assessed shall be the lesser of the Commission's actual expenses for the hearing or two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500). The fees collected shall be deposited in the Dispute Resolution Fund established pursuant to subsection (d) of this section.

(g) The General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division, may enforce subpoenas issued in the name of the Dispute Resolution Commission and requiring attendance and the giving of testimony by witnesses and the production of books, papers, and other documentary evidence.

(h) The Commission shall keep confidential all information in its files pertaining to the initial and renewal applications for certification of mediators, the qualification of other neutrals, and the initial and renewal applications for certification or qualification of training programs for mediators or other neutrals, except that in the case of an initial or renewal application for certification in the District Criminal Court Mediation Program, Commission staff shall notify the Executive Director of the Mediation Network of North Carolina, Inc., and the Executive Director of the community mediation center that is sponsoring the application of any matter regarding the qualifications, character, conduct, or fitness to practice of the applicant. The Commission shall also keep confidential the identity of those persons requesting informal guidance or the issuance of formal advisory opinions from the Commission or its staff.

All information in the Commission's disciplinary files pertaining to a complaint regarding the moral character, conduct, or fitness to practice of a mediator, other neutral, trainer, or other training program personnel shall remain confidential, unless the subject of the complaint requests otherwise, until such time as all of the following conditions are met:

- (1) A preliminary investigation is completed.
- (2) A determination is made that probable cause exists to believe that the words or actions of the mediator, neutral, trainer, or other training program personnel:
  - a. Violate standards for the conduct of mediators or other neutrals;

- b. Violate other standards of professional conduct to which the mediator, neutral, trainer, or other training program personnel is subject;
  - c. Violate program rules or applicable governing law; or
  - d. Consist of conduct or actions that are inconsistent with good moral character or reflect a lack of fitness to serve as a mediator, other neutral, trainer, or other training program personnel.
- (3) One of the following events has occurred:
- a. The respondent does not appeal the determination before the time permitted for an appeal has expired.
  - b. Upon a timely filed appeal, the Commission holds a hearing and issues a decision affirming the determination.

Upon a finding of probable cause under this subsection against a mediator arising out of a mediated settlement conference, Commission staff shall provide notice of the finding of probable cause to any mediation program or agency under whose auspices the mediated settlement conference was conducted. Commission shall also make reasonable efforts to notify any such agency or program of any public sanction imposed by the Commission pursuant to Supreme Court rules governing the operation of the Commission against a certified mediator who serves as a mediator for any such agency or program. Commission staff and members of the Grievance and Disciplinary Committee of the Commission may share information with other committee chairs or committees of the Commission when relevant to a review of any matter before such other committee.

The Commission may publish names, contact information, and biographical information for mediators, neutrals, and training programs that have been certified or qualified.

(i) All appeals from denials of initial applications for mediator certification and initial applications for mediator training program certification shall be held in private, unless the applicant requests a public hearing. Appeals from a denial of a mediator or mediator training program application for certification renewal or reinstatement that relate to moral character, conduct, or fitness to practice shall be open to the public, except that for good cause shown, the presiding officer may exclude from the hearing room all persons except the parties, counsel, and those engaged in the hearing. All other appeals from denials of a mediator training program's application for certification renewal shall be held in private, unless the applicant requests a public hearing.

(j) Appeals from the Commission's initial determination after review and investigation of a complaint that probable cause exists to believe that the conduct of a mediator, neutral, trainer, or other training program personnel violated a provision set out in subdivision (2) of subsection (h) of this section shall be open to the public, except that for good cause shown, the presiding officer may exclude from the hearing room all persons except the parties, counsel, and those engaged in the hearing. No hearing shall be closed to the public over the objection of the mediator, neutral, trainer, or training program personnel that is the subject of the complaint.

(k) Appeals of final determinations by the Commission to deny certification or renewal of certification, to revoke certification, or to discipline a mediator, trainer, or other training program personnel shall be filed in the General Court of Justice, Wake County Superior Court Division. Notice of appeal shall be filed within 30 days of the date of the Commission's decision.

(l) The Commission may issue a cease and desist letter to any individual who falsely represents himself or herself to the public as certified or as eligible to be certified pursuant to this section, or who uses any words, letters, titles, signs, cards, Web site postings, or advertisements

that expressly or implicitly convey such misrepresentation to the public. If the individual continues to make such false representations after receipt of the cease and desist letter, the Commission, through its Chair, may petition the Superior Court of Wake County for an injunction restraining the individual's conduct and for any other relief that the court deems appropriate.

(m) Members of the Commission and its employees are immune from civil suit for all conduct undertaken in the course of their official duties. (1995, c. 500, s. 1; 1998-212, s. 16.19(b), (c); 2005-167, ss. 2, 4; 2007-387, ss. 2, 3; 2010-169, s. 21(b); 2011-145, s. 15.5; 2011-411, s. 5; 2017-158, s. 26.8; 2019-243, s. 2(a); 2021-47, s. 4(a).)

### **§ 7A-38.3. Prelitigation mediation of farm nuisance disputes.**

(a) Definitions. – As used in this section:

- (1) "Farm nuisance dispute" means a claim that the farming activity of a farm resident constitutes a nuisance.
- (2) "Farm resident" means a person holding an interest in fee, under a real estate contract, or under a lease, in land used for farming activity when that person manages the operations on the land.
- (3) "Farming activity" means the cultivation of farmland for the production of crops, fruits, vegetables, ornamental and flowering plants, and the utilization of farmland for the production of dairy, livestock, poultry, and all other forms of agricultural products having a domestic or foreign market.
- (4) "Mediator" means a neutral person who acts to encourage and facilitate a resolution of a farm nuisance dispute.
- (5) "Nuisance" means an action that is injurious to health, indecent, offensive to the senses, or an obstruction to the free use of property.
- (6) "Party" means any person having a dispute with a farm resident.
- (7) "Person" means a natural person, or any corporation, trust, or limited partnership as defined in G.S. 59-102.

(b) Voluntary Mediation. – The parties to a farm nuisance dispute may agree at any time to mediation of the dispute under the provisions of this section.

(c) Mandatory Mediation. – Prior to bringing a civil action involving a farm nuisance dispute, a farm resident or any other party shall initiate mediation pursuant to this section. If a farm resident or any other party brings an action involving a farm nuisance dispute, this action shall, upon the motion of any party prior to trial, be dismissed without prejudice by the court unless any one or more of the following apply:

- (1) The dispute involves a claim that has been brought as a class action.
- (2) The nonmoving party has satisfied the requirements of this section and such is indicated in a mediator's certification issued under subsection (g) of this section.
- (3) The court finds that a mediator improperly failed to issue a certification indicating that the nonmoving party satisfied the requirements of this section.
- (4) The court finds good cause for a failure to attempt mediation. Good cause includes, but is not limited to, a determination that the time delay required for mediation would likely result in irreparable harm or that injunctive relief is otherwise warranted.

(d) Initiation of Mediation. – Prelitigation mediation of a farm nuisance dispute shall be initiated by filing a request for mediation with the clerk of superior court in a county in which the action may be brought. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall prescribe a request for

mediation form. The party filing the request for mediation also shall mail a copy of the request by certified mail, return receipt requested, to each party to the dispute. The clerk shall provide each party with a list of mediators certified by the Dispute Resolution Commission. If the parties agree in writing to the selection of a mediator from that list, the clerk shall appoint that mediator selected by the parties. If the parties do not agree on the selection of a mediator, the party filing the request for mediation shall bring the matter to the attention of the clerk, and a mediator shall be appointed by the senior resident superior court judge. The clerk shall notify the mediator and the parties of the appointment of the mediator.

(e) Mediation Procedure. – Except as otherwise expressly provided in this section, mediation under this section shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions for mediated settlement of civil cases in G.S. 7A-38.1 and G.S. 7A-38.2 and rules and standards adopted pursuant to those sections. The Supreme Court may adopt additional rules and standards to implement this section, including an exemption from the provisions of G.S. 7A-38.1 for cases in which mediation was attempted under this section.

(f) Waiver of Mediation. – The parties to the dispute may waive the mediation required by this section by informing the mediator of their waiver in writing. No costs shall be assessed to any party if all parties waive mediation prior to the occurrence of an initial mediation meeting.

(g) Certification That Mediation Concluded. – Immediately upon a waiver of mediation under subsection (f) of this section or upon the conclusion of mediation, the mediator shall prepare a certification stating the date on which the mediation was concluded and the general results of the mediation, including, as applicable, that the parties waived the mediation, that an agreement was reached, that mediation was attempted but an agreement was not reached, or that one or more parties, to be specified in the certification, failed or refused without good cause to attend one or more mediation meetings or otherwise participate in the mediation. The mediator shall file the original of the certification with the clerk and provide a copy to each party. Each party to the mediation has satisfied the requirements of this section upon the filing of the certification, except any party specified in the certification as having failed or refused to attend one or more mediation meetings or otherwise participate. The sanctions in G.S. 7A-38.1(g) do not apply to prelitigation mediation conducted under this section.

(h) Time Periods Tolled. – Any applicable statutes of limitations relating to a farm nuisance dispute shall be tolled upon the filing of a request for mediation under this section, until 30 days after the date on which the mediation is concluded as set forth in the mediator's certification, or if the mediator fails to set forth such date, until 30 days after the filing of the certification under subsection (g) of this section. The filing of a request for prelitigation mediation under subsection (d) of this section does not constitute the commencement or the bringing of an action involving a farm nuisance dispute. (1995, c. 500, s. 1; 2013-314, s. 2.)

### **§ 7A-38.3A. Prelitigation mediation of insurance claims.**

(a) Initiation of Mediation. – Prelitigation mediation of an insurance claim may be initiated by an insurer that has provided the policy limits in accordance with G.S. 58-3-33 by filing a request for mediation with the clerk of superior court in a county in which the action may be brought. The insurer also shall mail a copy of the request by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the person who requested the information under G.S. 58-3-33.

(b) Costs of Mediation. – Costs of mediation, including the mediator's fees, shall be borne by the insurer and claimant equally. When an attorney represents a party to the mediation, that party shall pay his or her attorneys' fees.

(c) Mediation Procedure. – Except as otherwise expressly provided in this section, mediation under this section shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions for mediated settlement of civil cases in G.S. 7A-38.1 and G.S. 7A-38.2, and rules and standards adopted pursuant to those sections. The Supreme Court may adopt additional rules and standards to implement this section, including an exemption from the provisions of G.S. 7A-38.1 for cases in which mediation was attempted under this section.

(d) Certification That Mediation Concluded. – Upon the conclusion of mediation, the mediator shall prepare a certification stating the date on which the mediation was concluded and the general results of the mediation, including, as applicable, that an agreement was reached, that mediation was attempted but an agreement was not reached, or that one or more parties, to be specified in the certification, failed or refused without good cause to attend one or more mediation meetings or otherwise participate in the mediation. The mediator shall file the original of the certification with the clerk and provide a copy to each party. Each party to the mediation has satisfied the requirements of this section upon the filing of the certification, except any party specified in the certification as having failed or refused to attend one or more mediation meetings or otherwise participate. The sanctions in G.S. 7A-38.1(g) do not apply to prelitigation mediation conducted under this section.

(e) Time Periods Tolloed. – Time periods relating to the filing of a claim or the taking of other action with respect to an insurance claim, including any applicable statutes of limitations, shall be tolled upon the filing of a request for mediation under this section, until 30 days after the date on which the mediation is concluded as set forth in the mediator's certification or, if the mediator fails to set forth such date, until 30 days after the filing of the certification under subsection (d) of this section.

(f) Medical Malpractice Claims Excluded. – This section does not apply to claims seeking recovery for medical malpractice. (2003-307, s. 2.)

### **§ 7A-38.3B. Mediation in matters within the jurisdiction of the clerk of superior court.**

(a) Purpose. – The General Assembly finds that the clerk of superior court in the General Court of Justice should have the discretion and authority to order that mediation be conducted in matters within the clerk's jurisdiction in order to facilitate a more economical, efficient, and satisfactory resolution of those matters.

(b) Enabling Authority. – The clerk of superior court may order that mediation be conducted in any matter in which the clerk has exclusive or original jurisdiction, except for matters under Chapters 45 and 48 of the General Statutes and except in matters in which the jurisdiction of the clerk is ancillary. The Supreme Court may adopt rules to implement this section. Such mediations shall be conducted pursuant to this section and the Supreme Court rules as adopted.

(c) Attendance. – In those matters ordered to mediation pursuant to this section, the following persons or entities, along with their attorneys, may be ordered by the clerk to attend the mediation:

- (1) Named parties.
- (2) Interested persons, meaning persons or entities who have a right, interest, or claim in the matter; heirs or devisees in matters under Chapter 28A of the General Statutes, next of kin under Chapter 35A of the General Statutes, and other persons or entities as the clerk deems necessary for the adjudication of the matter. The meaning of "interested person" may vary according to the issues involved in the matter.

- (3) Nonparty participants, meaning any other person or entity identified by the clerk as possessing useful information about the matter and whose attendance would be beneficial to the mediation.
- (4) Fiduciaries, meaning persons or entities who serve as fiduciaries, as that term is defined by G.S. 36A-22.1, of named parties, interested persons, or nonparty participants.

Any person or entity ordered to attend a mediation shall be notified of its date, time, and location and shall attend unless excused by rules of the Supreme Court or by order of the clerk. No one attending the mediation shall be required to make a settlement offer or demand that it deems contrary to its best interests.

(d) Selection of Mediator. – Persons ordered to mediation pursuant to this section have the right to designate a mediator in accordance with rules promulgated by the Supreme Court implementing this section. Upon failure of those persons to agree upon a designation within the time established by rules of the Supreme Court, a mediator certified by the Dispute Resolution Commission pursuant to those rules shall be appointed by the clerk.

(e) Immunity. – Mediators acting pursuant to this section shall have judicial immunity in the same manner and to the same extent as a judge of the General Court of Justice, except that mediators may be disciplined in accordance with procedures adopted by the Supreme Court pursuant to G.S. 7A-38.2.

(f) Costs of Mediation. – Costs of mediation under this section shall be borne by the named parties, interested persons, and fiduciaries ordered to attend the mediation. The rules adopted by the Supreme Court implementing this section shall set out the manner in which costs shall be paid and a method by which an opportunity to participate without cost shall be afforded to persons found by the clerk to be unable to pay their share of the costs of mediation. Costs may only be assessed against the estate of a decedent, the estate of an adjudicated or alleged incompetent, a trust corpus, or against a fiduciary upon the entry of a written order making specific findings of fact justifying the taxing of costs.

(g) Inadmissibility of Negotiations. – Evidence of statements made or conduct occurring during a mediation conducted pursuant to this section, whether attributable to any participant, mediator, expert, or neutral observer, shall not be subject to discovery and shall be inadmissible in any proceeding in the matter or other civil actions on the same claim, except in:

- (1) Proceedings for sanctions pursuant to this section;
- (2) Proceedings to enforce or rescind a written and signed settlement agreement;
- (3) Incompetency, guardianship, or estate proceedings in which a mediated agreement is presented to the clerk;
- (4) Disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission; or
- (5) Proceedings for abuse, neglect, or dependency of a juvenile, or for abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an adult, for which there is a duty to report under G.S. 7B-301 and Article 6 of Chapter 108A of the General Statutes, respectively.

No evidence otherwise discoverable shall be inadmissible merely because it is presented or discussed in mediation.

As used in this section, the term "neutral observer" includes persons seeking mediator certification, persons studying dispute resolution processes, and persons acting as interpreters.

(h) Testimony. – No mediator or neutral observer shall be compelled to testify or produce evidence concerning statements made and conduct occurring in anticipation of, during, or as a follow-up to the mediation in any civil proceeding for any purpose, including proceedings to enforce or rescind a settlement of the matter except to attest to the signing of any agreements reached in mediation, and except in:

- (1) Proceedings for sanctions pursuant to this section;
- (2) Disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission; or
- (3) Proceedings for abuse, neglect, or dependency of a juvenile, or for abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an adult, for which there is a duty to report under G.S. 7B-301 and Article 6 of Chapter 108A of the General Statutes, respectively.

(i) Agreements. – In matters before the clerk in which agreements are reached in a mediation conducted pursuant to this section, or during one of its recesses, those agreements shall be treated as follows:

- (1) Where as a matter of law, a matter may be resolved by agreement of the parties, a settlement is enforceable only if it has been reduced to writing and signed by the parties against whom enforcement is sought or signed by their designees.
- (2) In all other matters before the clerk, including guardianship and estate matters, all agreements shall be delivered to the clerk for consideration in deciding the matter.

(j) Sanctions. – Any person ordered to attend a mediation conducted pursuant to this section and rules of the Supreme Court who, without good cause, fails to attend the mediation or fails to pay any or all of the mediator's fee in compliance with this section and the rules promulgated by the Supreme Court to implement this section, is subject to the contempt powers of the clerk and monetary sanctions. The monetary sanctions may include the payment of fines, attorneys' fees, mediator fees, and the expenses and loss of earnings incurred by persons attending the mediation. If the clerk imposes sanctions, the clerk shall do so, after notice and a hearing, in a written order, making findings of fact and conclusions of law. An order imposing sanctions is reviewable by the superior court in accordance with G.S. 1-301.2 and G.S. 1-301.3, as applicable, and thereafter by the appellate courts in accordance with G.S. 7A-38.1(g).

(k) Authority to Supplement Procedural Details. – The clerk of superior court shall make all those orders just and necessary to safeguard the interests of all persons and may supplement all necessary procedural details not inconsistent with rules adopted by the Supreme Court implementing this section. (2005-67, s. 1; 2008-194, s. 8(b); 2015-57, s. 2; 2017-158, s. 26.7(c); 2021-47, s. 12(b).)

**§ 7A-38.3C:** Repealed by Session Laws 2007-491, s. 4, effective August 21, 2007.

**§ 7A-38.3D. Mediation in matters within the jurisdiction of the district criminal courts.**

(a) Purpose. – The General Assembly finds that it is in the public interest to promote high standards for persons who mediate matters in district criminal court. To that end, a program of certification for these mediators shall be established in judicial districts designated by the Dispute Resolution Commission and the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts and in which the chief district court judge, the district attorney, and the community mediation center agree to participate. This section does not supersede G.S. 7A-38.5.

(b) Enabling Authority. – In each district, the court may encourage mediation for any criminal district court action pending in the district, and the district attorney may delay prosecution of those actions so that the mediation may take place.

(c) Program Administration. – A community mediation center established under G.S. 7A-38.5 and located in a district designated under subsection (a) of this section shall assist the court in administering a program providing mediation services in district criminal court cases. A community mediation center may assist in the screening and scheduling of cases for mediation and provide certified volunteer or staff mediators to conduct district criminal court mediations.

(d) Rules of Procedure. – The Supreme Court shall adopt rules to implement this section. Each mediation shall be conducted pursuant to this section and the Supreme Court Rules as adopted.

(e) Mediator Authority. – In the mediator's discretion, any person whose presence and participation may assist in resolving the dispute or addressing any issues underlying the mediation may be permitted to attend and participate. The mediator shall have discretion to exclude any individual who seeks to attend the mediation but whose participation the mediator deems would be counterproductive. Lawyers for the participants may attend and participate in the mediation.

(f) Mediator Qualification. – The Supreme Court shall establish requirements for the certification or qualification of mediators serving under this section. The Court shall also establish requirements for the qualification of training programs and trainers, including community mediation center staff, that train these mediators. The Court shall also adopt rules regulating the conduct of these mediators and trainers.

(g) Oversight and Evaluation. – The Supreme Court may require community mediation centers and their volunteer or staff mediators to collect and report caseload statistics, referral sources, fees collected, and any other information deemed essential for program oversight and evaluation purposes.

(h) Immunity. – A mediator under this section has judicial immunity in the same manner and to the same extent as a judge of the General Court of Justice, except that a mediator may be disciplined in accordance with procedures adopted by the Supreme Court. A community mediation center and its staff involved in supplying volunteer or staff mediators or other personnel to schedule cases or perform other duties under this section are immune from suit in any civil action, except in any case of willful or wanton misconduct.

(i) Confidentiality. – Any memorandum, work note, or product of the mediator and any case file maintained by a community mediation center acting under this section and any mediator certification application are confidential.

(j) Inadmissibility of Negotiations. – Evidence of any statement made and conduct occurring during a mediation under this section shall not be subject to discovery and shall be inadmissible in any proceeding in the action from which the mediation arises. Any participant in a mediation conducted under this section, including the mediator, may report to law enforcement personnel any statement made or conduct occurring during the mediation process that threatens or threatened the safety of any person or property. A mediator has discretion to warn a person whose safety or property has been threatened. No evidence otherwise discoverable is inadmissible for the reason it is presented or discussed in a mediated settlement conference or other settlement proceeding under this section.

(k) Testimony. – No mediator or neutral observer present at the mediation shall be compelled to testify or produce evidence concerning statements made and conduct occurring in or

related to a mediation conducted under this section in any proceeding in the same action for any purpose, except in:

- (1) Proceedings for abuse, neglect, or dependency of a juvenile, or for abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an adult, for which there is a duty to report under G.S. 7B-301 and Article 6 of Chapter 108A of the General Statutes, respectively.
- (2) Disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission.
- (3) Proceedings in which the mediator acts as a witness pursuant to subsection (j) of this section.
- (4) Trials of a felony, during which a presiding judge may compel the disclosure of any evidence arising out of the mediation, excluding a statement made by the defendant in the action under mediation, if it is to be introduced in the trial or disposition of the felony and the judge determines that the introduction of the evidence is necessary to the proper administration of justice and the evidence cannot be obtained from any other source.

(l) **Written Agreements.** – Any agreement reached in mediation is enforceable only if it has been reduced to writing and signed by the parties against whom enforcement is sought. A non-attorney mediator may assist parties in reducing the agreement to writing.

(m) **Dispute Resolution Fee.** – A dispute resolution fee shall be assessed and paid to the clerk in advance of mediation as set forth in G.S. 7A-38.7. By agreement, all or any portion of the fee may be paid by a person other than the defendant. If the dispute resolution fee is paid by an outside source other than the parties to the action, the fees may be paid directly to a community mediation center. The fee may also be waived in part or in its entirety pursuant to G.S. 7A-38.7.

(n) **Definitions.** – As used in this section, the following definitions apply:

- (1) **Court.** – A district court judge, a district attorney, or the designee of a district court judge or district attorney.
- (2) **Neutral observer.** – Includes any person seeking mediator certification, any person studying any dispute resolution process, and any person acting as an interpreter. (2007-387, s. 1; 2012-194, s. 63.3(b); 2015-57, s. 3; 2016-107, s. 7; 2017-158, s. 26.7(d); 2023-34, s. 6.)

### **§ 7A-38.3E. Mediation of public records disputes.**

(a) **Voluntary Mediation.** – The parties to a public records dispute under Chapter 132 of the General Statutes may agree at any time prior to filing a civil action under Chapter 132 of the General Statutes to mediation of the dispute under the provisions of this section. Mediation of a public records dispute shall be initiated by filing a request for mediation with the clerk of superior court in a county in which the action may be brought.

(b) **Mandatory Mediation.** – Subsequent to filing a civil action under Chapter 132 of the General Statutes, a person shall initiate mediation pursuant to this section. Such mediation shall be initiated no later than 30 days from the filing of responsive pleadings with the clerk in the county where the action is filed.

(c) **Initiation of Mediation.** – The Administrative Office of the Courts shall prescribe a request for mediation form. The party filing the request for mediation shall mail a copy of the request by certified mail, return receipt requested, to each party to the dispute. The clerk shall provide each party with a list of mediators certified by the Dispute Resolution Commission. If the

parties agree in writing to the selection of a mediator from that list, the clerk shall appoint that mediator selected by the parties. If the parties do not agree on the selection of a mediator, the party filing the request for mediation shall bring the matter to the attention of the clerk, and a mediator shall be appointed by the senior resident superior court judge. The clerk shall notify the mediator and the parties of the appointment of the mediator.

(d) Mediation Procedure. – Except as otherwise expressly provided in this section, mediation under this section shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions for mediated settlement of civil cases in G.S. 7A-38.1 and G.S. 7A-38.2 and rules and standards adopted pursuant to those sections. The Supreme Court may adopt additional rules and standards to implement this section, including an exemption from the provisions of G.S. 7A-38.1 for cases in which mediation was attempted under this section.

(e) Waiver of Mediation. – The parties to the dispute may waive the mediation required by this section by informing the mediator of the parties' waiver in writing. No costs shall be assessed to any party if all parties waive mediation prior to the occurrence of an initial mediation meeting.

(f) Certification That Mediation Concluded. – Immediately upon a waiver of mediation under subsection (e) of this section or upon the conclusion of mediation, the mediator shall prepare a certification stating the date on which the mediation was concluded and the general results of the mediation, including, as applicable, that the parties waived the mediation, that an agreement was reached, that mediation was attempted but an agreement was not reached, or that one or more parties, to be specified in the certification, failed or refused without good cause to attend one or more mediation meetings or otherwise participate in the mediation. The mediator shall file the original of the certification with the clerk and provide a copy to each party.

(g) Time Periods Tolloed. – Time periods relating to the filing of a claim or the taking of other action with respect to a public records dispute, including any applicable statutes of limitations, shall be tolled upon the filing of a request for mediation under this section, until 30 days after the date on which the mediation is concluded as set forth in the mediator's certification, or if the mediator fails to set forth such date, until 30 days after the filing of the certification under subsection (f) of this section.

(h) [Other Remedies Not Affected.] – Nothing in this section shall prevent a party seeking production of public records from seeking injunctive or other relief, including production of public records prior to any scheduled mediation. (2010-169, s. 21(a).)

### **§ 7A-38.3F. Prelitigation mediation of condominium and homeowners association disputes.**

(a) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:

- (1) Association. – An association of unit or lot owners organized as allowed under North Carolina law, including G.S. 47C-3-101 and G.S. 47F-3-101.
- (2) Dispute. – Any matter relating to real estate under the jurisdiction of an association about which the member and association cannot agree. The term "dispute" does not include matters expressly exempted in subsection (b) of this section.
- (3) Executive board. – The body, regardless of name, designated in the declaration to act on behalf of an association.
- (4) Mediator. – A neutral person who acts to encourage and facilitate a resolution of a dispute between an association and a member.

- (5) Member. – A person who is a member of an association of unit or lot owners organized as allowed under North Carolina law, including G.S. 47C-3-101 and G.S. 47F-3-101.
- (6) Party or parties. – An association or member who is involved in a dispute, as that term is defined in subdivision (2) of this subsection.

(b) Voluntary Prelitigation Mediation. – Prior to filing a civil action, the parties to a dispute arising under Chapter 47C of the General Statutes (North Carolina Condominium Act), Chapter 47F of the General Statutes (North Carolina Planned Community Act), or an association's declaration, bylaws, or rules and regulations are encouraged to initiate mediation pursuant to this section. However, disputes related solely to a member's failure to timely pay an association assessment or any fines or fees associated with the levying or collection of an association assessment are not covered under this section.

(c) Initiation of Mediation. – Either an association or a member may contact the North Carolina Dispute Resolution Commission or the Mediation Network of North Carolina for the name of a mediator or community mediation center. Upon contacting a mediator, either the association or member may supply to the mediator the physical address of the other party, or the party's representative, and the party's telephone number and e-mail address, if known. The mediator shall contact the party, or the party's representative, to notify him or her of the request to mediate. If the parties agree to mediate, they shall request in writing that the mediator schedule the mediation. The mediator shall then notify the parties in writing of the date, time, and location of the mediation, which shall be scheduled not later than 25 days after the mediator receives the written request from the parties.

(d) Mediation Procedure. – The following procedures shall apply to mediation under this section:

- (1) Attendance. – The mediator shall determine who may attend mediation. The mediator may require the executive board or a large group of members to designate one or more persons to serve as their representatives in the mediation.
- (2) All parties are expected to attend mediation. The mediator may allow a party to participate in mediation by telephone or other electronic means if the mediator determines that the party has a compelling reason to do so.
- (3) If the parties cannot reach a final agreement in mediation because to do so would require the approval of the full executive board or the approval of a majority or some other percentage of the members of the association, the mediator may recess the mediation meeting to allow the executive board or members to review and vote on the agreement.

(e) Decline Mediation. – Either party to a dispute may decline mediation under this section. If either party declines mediation after mediation has been initiated under subsection (c) of this section but mediation has not been held, the party declining mediation shall inform the mediator and the other party in writing of his or her decision to decline mediation. No costs shall be assessed to any party if either party declines mediation prior to the occurrence of an initial mediation meeting.

(f) Costs of Mediation. – The costs of mediation, including the mediator's fees, shall be shared equally by the parties unless otherwise agreed to by the parties. Fees shall be due and payable at the end of each mediation meeting. When an attorney represents a party to the mediation, that party shall pay his or her attorneys' fees.

(g) Certification That Mediation Concluded. – Upon the conclusion of mediation, the mediator shall prepare a certification stating the date on which the mediation was concluded and a statement that an agreement was reached or that mediation was attempted but an agreement was not reached. If both parties participate in mediation and a cause of action involving the dispute mediated is later filed, either party may file the certificate with the clerk of court, and the parties shall not be required to mediate again under any provision of law.

(h) Inadmissibility of Evidence. – Evidence of statements made and conduct occurring during mediation under this section shall not be subject to discovery and shall be inadmissible in any proceeding in a civil action arising from the dispute which was the subject of that mediation; except proceedings to enforce or rescind a settlement agreement reached at that mediation, disciplinary proceedings before the State Bar or Dispute Resolution Commission, or proceedings to enforce laws concerning juvenile or elder abuse. No evidence otherwise discoverable shall be inadmissible merely because it is presented or discussed in a mediation under this section.

No mediator shall be compelled to testify or produce evidence concerning statements made and conduct occurring in anticipation of, during, or as a follow-up to a mediation pursuant to this section in any civil proceeding for any purpose, including proceedings to enforce or rescind the settlement agreement; except in disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or Dispute Resolution Commission and proceedings to enforce laws concerning juvenile or elder abuse, and except in proceedings to enforce or rescind an agreement reached in a mediation under this section, but only to attest to the signing of the agreement.

(i) Time Periods Tolloed. – Time periods relating to the filing of a civil action, including any applicable statutes of limitations or statutes of repose, with respect to a dispute described in subsection (a) of this section, shall be tolled upon the initiation of mediation under this section until 30 days after the date on which the mediation is concluded as set forth in the mediator's certification. For purposes of this section, "initiation of mediation" shall be defined as the date upon which both parties have signed the written request to schedule the mediation.

(j) Association Duty to Notify. – Each association shall, in writing, notify the members of the association each year that they may initiate mediation under this section to try to resolve a dispute with the association. The association shall publish the notice required in this subsection on the association's Web site; but if the association does not have a Web site, the association shall publish the notice at the same time and in the same manner as the names and addresses of all officers and board members of the association are published as provided in G.S. 47C-3-103 and G.S. 47F-3-103. (2013-127, s. 1.)

**§ 7A-38.4: Repealed by Session Laws 2001-320, s. 1.**

**§ 7A-38.4A. Settlement procedures in district court actions.**

(a) The General Assembly finds that a system of settlement events should be established to facilitate the settlement of district court actions involving equitable distribution, alimony, or support and to make that litigation more economical, efficient, and satisfactory to the parties, their representatives, and the State. District courts should be able to require parties to those actions and their representatives to attend a pretrial mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure conducted under this section and rules adopted by the Supreme Court to implement this section.

(b) The definitions in G.S. 7A-38.1(b)(2) and (b)(3) apply in this section.

(c) Any chief district court judge in a judicial district may order a mediated settlement conference or another settlement procedure, as provided under subsection (g) of this section, for any action pending in that district involving issues of equitable distribution, alimony, child or post separation support, or claims arising out of contracts between the parties under G.S. 52-10, G.S. 52-10.1, or Chapter 52B of the General Statutes. The chief district court judge may adopt local rules that order settlement procedures in all of the foregoing actions and designate other district court judges or administrative personnel to issue orders implementing those settlement procedures. However, local rules adopted by a chief district court judge shall not be inconsistent with any rules adopted by the Supreme Court.

(d) The parties to a district court action where a mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure is ordered, their attorneys, and other persons or entities with authority, by law or contract, to settle a party's claim, shall attend the mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure, unless the rules ordering the settlement procedure provide otherwise. No party or other participant in a mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure is required to make a settlement offer or demand that the party or participant deems contrary to that party's or participant's best interests. Parties who have been victims of domestic violence may be excused from physically attending or participating in a mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure.

(e) Any person required to attend a mediated settlement conference or other settlement procedure under this section who, without good cause fails to attend or fails to pay any or all of the mediator or other neutral's fee in compliance with this section is subject to the contempt powers of the court and monetary sanctions imposed by a district court judge. A party seeking sanctions against another party or person shall do so in a written motion stating the grounds for the motion and the relief sought. The motion shall be served upon all parties and upon any person against whom sanctions are being sought. The court may initiate sanction proceedings upon its own motion by the entry of a show cause order. If the court imposes sanctions, it shall do so, after notice and hearing, in a written order making findings of fact and conclusions of law. An order imposing sanctions is reviewable upon appeal, and the entire record shall be reviewed to determine whether the order is supported by substantial evidence.

(f) The parties to a district court action in which a mediated settlement conference is to be held under this section shall have the right to designate a mediator. Upon failure of the parties to designate within the time established by the rules adopted by the Supreme Court, a mediator shall be appointed by a district court judge.

(g) A chief district court judge or that judge's designee, at the request of a party and with the consent of all parties, may order the parties to attend and participate in any other settlement procedure authorized by rules adopted by the Supreme Court or adopted by local district court rules, in lieu of attending a mediated settlement conference. Neutrals acting under this section shall be selected and compensated in accordance with rules adopted by the Supreme Court. Nothing herein shall prohibit the parties from participating in other dispute resolution procedures, including arbitration, to the extent authorized under State or federal law. Nothing herein shall prohibit the parties from participating in mediation at a community mediation center operating under G.S. 7A-38.5.

(h) Mediators and other neutrals acting under this section shall have judicial immunity in the same manner and to the same extent as a judge of the General Court of Justice, except that mediators and other neutrals may be disciplined in accordance with enforcement procedures adopted by the Supreme Court under G.S. 7A-38.2.

(i) Costs of mediated settlement conferences and other settlement procedures shall be borne by the parties. Unless otherwise ordered by the court or agreed to by the parties, the mediator's fees shall be paid in equal shares by the parties. The rules adopted by the Supreme Court shall set out a method whereby a party found by the court to be unable to pay the costs of settlement procedures is afforded an opportunity to participate without cost to that party and without expenditure of State funds.

(j) Evidence of statements made and conduct occurring in a mediated settlement conference or other settlement proceeding conducted under this section, whether attributable to a party, the mediator, other neutral, or a neutral observer present at the settlement proceeding, shall not be subject to discovery and shall be inadmissible in any proceeding in the action or other civil actions on the same claim, except:

- (1) In proceedings for sanctions under this section;
- (2) In proceedings to enforce or rescind a settlement of the action;
- (3) In disciplinary proceedings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission; or
- (4) In proceedings to enforce laws concerning juvenile or elder abuse.

As used in this subsection, the term "neutral observer" includes persons seeking mediator certification, persons studying dispute resolution processes, and persons acting as interpreters.

No settlement agreement to resolve any or all issues reached at the proceeding conducted under this section or during its recesses shall be enforceable unless it has been reduced to writing and signed by the parties against whom enforcement is sought and in all other respects complies with the requirements of Chapter 50 of the General Statutes. No evidence otherwise discoverable shall be inadmissible merely because it is presented or discussed in a settlement proceeding.

No mediator, other neutral, or neutral observer present at a settlement proceeding under this section, shall be compelled to testify or produce evidence concerning statements made and conduct occurring in anticipation of, during, or as a follow-up to a mediated settlement conference or other settlement proceeding pursuant to this section in any civil proceeding for any purpose, including proceedings to enforce or rescind a settlement of the action, except to attest to the signing of any agreements, and except proceedings for sanctions under this section, disciplinary hearings before the State Bar or the Dispute Resolution Commission, and proceedings to enforce laws concerning juvenile or elder abuse.

(k) The Supreme Court may adopt standards for the certification and conduct of mediators and other neutrals who participate in settlement procedures conducted under this section. The standards may also regulate mediator training programs. The Supreme Court may adopt procedures for the enforcement of those standards. The administration of mediator certification, regulation of mediator conduct, and decertification shall be conducted through the Dispute Resolution Commission.

(l) An administrative fee not to exceed two hundred dollars (\$200.00) may be charged by the Administrative Office of the Courts to applicants for certification and annual renewal of certification for mediators and mediator training programs operating under this section. The fees collected may be used by the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts to establish and maintain the operations of the Commission and its staff. The administrative fee shall be set by the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts in consultation with the Dispute Resolution Commission.

(m) The Administrative Office of the Courts, in consultation with the Dispute Resolution Commission, may require the chief district court judge of any district to report statistical data about settlement procedures conducted under this section for administrative purposes.

(n) Nothing in this section or in rules adopted by the Supreme Court implementing this section shall restrict a party's right to a trial by jury.

(o) The Supreme Court may adopt rules to implement this section. (1997-229, s. 1; 1998-212, s. 16.19(a); 1999-354, s. 6; 2000-140, s. 1; 2001-320, s. 2; 2001-487, s. 39; 2005-167, s. 3; 2008-194, s. 8(c); 2015-57, s. 4; 2017-158, s. 26.7(b).)

#### **§ 7A-38.5. Community mediation centers.**

(a) The General Assembly finds that it is in the public interest to encourage the establishment of community mediation centers, also known as dispute settlement centers or dispute resolution centers, to support the work of these centers in facilitating communication, understanding, reconciliation, and settlement of conflicts in communities, courts, and schools, and to promote the widest possible use of these centers by the courts and law enforcement officials across the State. A center may establish and charge fees for its services other than for criminal court mediations. Fees for criminal court mediation are set forth in G.S. 7A-38.7, and centers and mediators shall not charge any other fees in such cases.

(b) Community mediation centers, functioning as or within nonprofit organizations and local governmental entities, may receive referrals from courts, law enforcement agencies, and other public entities for the purpose of facilitating communication, understanding, reconciliation, and settlement of conflicts.

(c) Each chief district court judge and district attorney shall encourage mediation for any criminal district court action pending in the district when the judge and district attorney determine that mediation is an appropriate alternative.

(d) Each chief district court judge shall encourage mediation for any civil district court action pending in the district when the judge determines that mediation is an appropriate alternative.

(e) Except as provided in this subsection and subsection (f) of this section, each chief district court judge and district attorney shall refer any misdemeanor criminal action in district court that is generated by a citizen-initiated arrest warrant or criminal summons to the local mediation center for resolution, except for (i) any case involving domestic violence; (ii) any case in which the judge or the district attorney determine that mediation would be inappropriate; or (iii) any case being tried in a county in which mediation services are not available. The mediation center shall have 45 days to resolve each case and report back to the court with a resolution. The district attorney shall delay prosecution in order for the mediation to occur. If the case is not resolved through mediation within 45 days of referral, or if any party declines to enter into mediation, the court may proceed with the case as a criminal action. For purposes of this section, the term "citizen-initiated arrest warrant or criminal summons" means a warrant or summons issued pursuant to G.S. 15A-303 or G.S. 15A-304 by a magistrate or other judicial official based upon information supplied through the oath or affirmation of a private citizen.

(f) Any prosecutorial district may opt out of the mandatory mediation under subsection (e) of this section if the district attorney files a statement with the chief district court judge declaring that subsection shall not apply within the prosecutorial district.

(g) Nothing in this section is intended to prohibit or delay the appointment or engagement of an attorney for a defendant in a criminal case. (1999-354, s. 1; 2011-145, s. 31.24(b); 2012-194, s. 63.3(a); 2016-107, s. 8.)

§ 7A-38.6: Repealed by Session Laws 2014-100, s. 18B.1(g), effective July 1, 2014.

**§ 7A-38.7. Dispute resolution fee for cases referred to mediation.**

(a) In each criminal case filed in the General Court of Justice that is referred to a community mediation center, a dispute resolution fee shall be assessed in the sum of sixty dollars (\$60.00) per mediation of that criminal case, in accordance with subsection (c) of this section, to support the services provided by the community mediation centers and the Mediation Network of North Carolina. Prior to mediation, the court shall cause the mediation participants to be informed that the dispute resolution fee shall be paid as part of any mediation of a criminal case. The fee shall be paid to the clerk in advance of the mediation. Fees assessed under this section shall be paid to the clerk of superior court in the county where the case was filed and remitted by the clerk to the Mediation Network of North Carolina. The Mediation Network may retain up to three dollars (\$3.00) of this amount as an allowance for its administrative expenses. The Mediation Network must remit the remainder of this amount to the community mediation center that mediated the case. If the dispute resolution fee is paid from an outside source other than the parties to the action, the fee may be paid directly to the community mediation center providing services. The court may waive or reduce a fee assessed under this section only upon entry of a written order determining there is just cause to grant the waiver or reduction. The court may, upon motion of the district attorney and affirmative consent of a community mediation center providing mediation services, waive or reduce a fee assessed under this section as applied to an entire class of criminal cases by administrative order or otherwise when the court finds that a program exists in the judicial district that operates in compliance with G.S. 7A-38.3D and such fee prevents access to a community mediation center. A community mediation center may withdraw their consent to waive the fees assessed for an entire class of criminal cases by providing written notice to the district attorney, who shall file a motion to withdraw with the court.

(b) Before providing the district attorney with a dismissal form, the community mediation center shall require proof that the defendant has paid the dispute resolution fee as required by subsection (a) of this section and shall attach the receipt to the dismissal form.

(c) All related criminal charges per defendant that are subject to mediation shall be treated as a single criminal case for the purpose of calculating the sixty-dollar (\$60.00) dispute resolution fee. In advance of the mediation, the participants, including all complainants, defendants, and other parties to the mediation, shall discuss whether the dispute resolution fee shall be allocated between them. If the participants do not reach agreement on an allocation of the dispute resolution fee, then the fee shall be the responsibility of the defendant, unless the court waives or reduces the fee upon entry of a written order, supported by findings of fact and conclusions of law, determining there is just cause to waive or reduce the fee. In connection with any mediation subject to this section, no mediator or any other community mediation center volunteer or employee shall receive any payment directly from any participant in the mediation, regardless of whether the payment is a dispute resolution fee, cost of court, restitution, or any other fee required by law or court order. No mediator or community mediation center shall charge or collect any fees for mediating criminal cases other than the dispute resolution fee assessed pursuant to subsection (a) of this section. (2002-126, s. 29A.11(a); 2003-284, s. 13.13; 2011-145, s. 31.24(d); 2012-142, s. 16.6(a); 2016-107, s. 9; 2023-34, s. 7.)

**§ 7A-39. Cancellation of court sessions and closing court offices; extension of statutes of limitations and other emergency orders in catastrophic conditions.**

(a) Cancellation of Court Sessions, Closing Court Offices. – In response to adverse weather or other emergency situations, including catastrophic conditions, any session of any court of the General Court of Justice may be cancelled, postponed, or altered by judicial officials, and court offices may be closed by judicial branch hiring authorities, pursuant to uniform statewide guidelines prescribed by the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. As used in this section, "catastrophic conditions" means any set of circumstances that makes it impossible or extremely hazardous for judicial officials, employees, parties, witnesses, or other persons with business before the courts to reach a courthouse, or that creates a significant risk of physical harm to persons in a courthouse, or that would otherwise convince a reasonable person to avoid traveling to or being in a courthouse.

(b) Authority of Chief Justice. – When the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court determines and declares that catastrophic conditions exist or have existed in one or more counties of the State, the Chief Justice may by order entered pursuant to this subsection:

- (1) Extend, to a date certain no fewer than 10 days after the effective date of the order, the time or period of limitation within which pleadings, motions, notices, and other documents and papers may be timely filed and other acts may be timely done in civil actions, criminal actions, estates, and special proceedings in each county named in the order. The Chief Justice may enter an order under this subsection during the catastrophic conditions or at any time after such conditions have ceased to exist. The order shall be in writing and shall become effective for each affected county upon the date set forth in the order, and if no date is set forth in the order, then upon the date the order is signed by the Chief Justice.
- (2) Issue any emergency directives that, notwithstanding any other provision of law, are necessary to ensure the continuing operation of essential trial or appellate court functions, including the designation or assignment of judicial officials who may be authorized to act in the general or specific matters stated in the emergency order, and the designation of the county or counties and specific locations within the State where such matters may be heard, conducted, or otherwise transacted. The Chief Justice may enter such emergency orders under this subsection in response to existing or impending catastrophic conditions or their consequences. An emergency order under this subsection shall expire the sooner of the date stated in the order, or 30 days from issuance of the order, but the order may be extended in whole or in part by the Chief Justice for additional 30-day periods if the Chief Justice determines that the directives remain necessary.

(c) In Chambers Jurisdiction Not Affected. – Nothing in this section prohibits a judge or other judicial officer from exercising, during adverse weather or other emergency situations, including catastrophic conditions, any in chambers or ex parte jurisdiction conferred by law upon that judge or judicial officer, as provided by law. The effectiveness of any such exercise shall not be affected by a determination by the Chief Justice that catastrophic conditions existed at the time it was exercised.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed to abrogate or diminish the inherent judicial powers of the Chief Justice or the Judicial Branch. (2000-166, s. 1; 2006-187, s. 6; 2009-516, s. 11.)