

§ 7B-2902. Disclosure in child fatality or near fatality cases.

(a) The following definitions apply in this section:

- (1) Child fatality. – The death of a child from suspected abuse, neglect, or maltreatment.
- (2) Findings and information. – A written summary, as allowed by subsections (c) through (f) of this section, of actions taken or services rendered by a public agency following receipt of information that a child might be in need of protection. The written summary shall include any of the following information the agency is able to provide:
 - a. The dates, outcomes, and results of any actions taken or services rendered.
 - b. The results of any review by a local child fatality review team, or any public agency.
 - c. Confirmation of the receipt of all reports, accepted or not accepted by the county department of social services, for investigation of suspected child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment, including confirmation that investigations were conducted, the results of the investigations, a description of the conduct of the most recent investigation and the services rendered, and a statement of basis for the department's decision.
- (3) Near fatality. – A case in which a physician determines that a child is in serious or critical condition as the result of sickness or injury caused by suspected abuse, neglect, or maltreatment.
- (4) Public agency. – Any agency of State government or its subdivisions as defined in G.S. 132-1(a).

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

- (1) A person is criminally charged with having caused the child fatality or near fatality; or
- (2) The district attorney has certified that a person would be charged with having caused the child fatality or near fatality but for that person's prior death.

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

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

- (1) Is not authorized by subsections (a) and (b) of this section;
- (2) Is likely to cause mental or physical harm or danger to a minor child residing in the deceased or injured child's household;
- (3) Is likely to jeopardize the State's ability to prosecute the defendant;
- (4) Is likely to jeopardize the defendant's right to a fair trial;
- (5) Is likely to undermine an ongoing or future criminal investigation; or
- (6) Is not authorized by federal law and regulations.

(e) Any person whose request is denied may apply to the appropriate superior court for an order compelling disclosure of the findings and information of the public agency. The application shall set forth, with reasonable particularity, factors supporting the application. The superior court shall have jurisdiction to issue such orders. Actions brought pursuant to this section shall be set down for immediate hearing, and subsequent proceedings in such actions shall be accorded priority by the appellate courts. After the court has reviewed the specific findings and information, in camera, the court shall issue an order compelling disclosure unless the court finds that one or more of the circumstances in subsection (d) of this section exist.

(f) Access to criminal investigative reports and criminal intelligence information of public law enforcement agencies and confidential information in the possession of the local teams, and the Child Fatality Task Force, shall be governed by G.S. 132-1.4 and G.S. 7B-1413 respectively. Nothing herein shall be deemed to require the disclosure or release of any information in the possession of a district attorney.

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

(h) Nothing herein shall be deemed to narrow or limit the definition of "public records" as set forth in G.S. 132-1(a). (1997-459, s. 1; 1998-202, s. 6; 2023-134, s. 9H.15(g).)