

Introduced by

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact chapter 27-20.5 of the North Dakota Century Code,
2 relating to fitness to proceed and remediation of juveniles; to amend and reenact section
3 12.1-04-01, subsection 5 of section 12.1-04-08, subsection 5 of section 27-20.3-01, and section
4 27-20.4-15 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the age of an offender, suspension or
5 dismissal of proceedings, predispositional assessment, and the definition of a child in need of
6 protection; to provide an appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

7 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

8 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 12.1-04-01 of the North Dakota Century Code is
9 amended and reenacted as follows:

10 **12.1-04-01. Juveniles.**

11 ~~1. An individual under the age of ten years is deemed incapable of commission of an~~
12 ~~offense defined by the constitution or statutes of this state.~~ The prosecution of an individual as
13 an adult is barred if the offense was committed while the individual was less than fourteen years
14 of age.

15 ~~2. An individual ten years of age or older may be assessed for mental fitness or capacity~~
16 ~~under this chapter.~~

17 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Subsection 5 of section 12.1-04-08 of the North Dakota
18 Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

19 5. If the court orders the defendant committed to a treatment facility in an attempt to
20 attain fitness to proceed under subsection ~~4~~2, the court shall provide the special
21 custody and commitment terms in the order. The special terms of commitment must
22 include an order for the defendant to accept all nonexperimental, generally accepted
23 medical, psychiatric, or psychological treatment recommended by the treatment

1 facility, including the use of involuntary treatment with prescribed medication without
2 the need for a separate commitment under chapter 25-03.1.

3 a. If the order does not indicate the terms of commitment, the director or
4 superintendent of the treatment facility may determine the nature of the
5 constraints necessary within the treatment facility to carry out the order of the
6 court.

7 b. If the court orders an individual committed for therapeutic treatment to attain
8 fitness to proceed, the court shall set a date consistent with the timeline
9 established in this section for a review of the defendant's fitness to proceed. At
10 least sixty days before the date specified for review, the director or director's
11 designee or the superintendent of the treatment facility shall inquire as to whether
12 the individual is represented by counsel and file a written report of the facts
13 ascertained with the court.

14 **SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.** Subsection 5 of section 27-20.3-01 of the North Dakota
15 Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

16 5. "Child in need of protection" means a child who:

17 a. Is without proper parental care or control, subsistence, education as required by
18 law, or other care or control necessary for the child's physical, mental, or
19 emotional health, or morals, and the need for services or protection is not due
20 primarily to the lack of financial means of the child's parents, guardian, or other
21 custodian;

22 b. Has been placed for care or adoption in violation of law;

23 c. Has been abandoned by the child's parents, guardian, or other custodian;

24 d. Is without proper parental care, control, or education as required by law, or other
25 care and control necessary for the child's well-being because of the physical,
26 mental, emotional, or other illness or disability of the child's parent or parents,
27 and that such lack of care is not due to a willful act of commission or act of
28 omission by the child's parents, and care is requested by a parent;

29 e. Is in need of treatment and whose parents, guardian, or other custodian have
30 refused to participate in treatment as ordered by the juvenile court;

- 1 f. Was subject to prenatal exposure to chronic or severe use of alcohol or any
2 controlled substance as defined in chapter 19-03.1 in a manner not lawfully
3 prescribed by a practitioner;
- 4 g. Is present in an environment subjecting the child to exposure to a controlled
5 substance, chemical substance, or drug paraphernalia as prohibited by section
6 19-03.1-22.2; ~~or~~
- 7 h. Is a victim of human trafficking as defined in title 12.1; or
- 8 i. Was found to lack fitness to proceed by a court in a delinquency case and the
9 delinquency case was dismissed within the six months preceding the filing of the
10 petition.

11 **SECTION 4. AMENDMENT.** Section 27-20.4-15 of the North Dakota Century Code is
12 amended and reenacted as follows:

13 **27-20.4-15. Predispositional assessment.**

- 14 1. Before the disposition hearing, the court shall direct the director or designee, to
15 conduct a predisposition assessment and to prepare a written report for the court,
16 unless waived by the court.
- 17 2. The predisposition assessment must consist of a risk and needs assessment together
18 with any other appropriate screenings.
- 19 3. During the pendency of any proceeding the court may order:
- 20 a. The child to be examined at a suitable place by a physician, psychologist, or
21 certified addiction counselor;
- 22 b. The child to be tested by appropriate forensic methods to determine whether the
23 child has been exposed to a controlled substance or other substance considered
24 injurious to the child's health;
- 25 c. Medical or surgical treatment of a child who is suffering from a serious physical
26 condition or illness, or alcohol or drug abuse, which in the opinion of a licensed
27 physician requires prompt treatment, even if the parent, guardian, or other
28 custodian has not been given notice of a hearing, is not available, or without
29 good cause informs the court of that person's refusal to consent to the treatment;
30 or

- 1 d. An evidence-based risk and needs assessment, mental health screening, or
2 trauma screening; ~~or~~
- 3 e. ~~The child to be examined to determine the child's competence or criminal~~
4 ~~responsibility. If the child is found to lack competency or criminal responsibility the~~
5 ~~court may:~~
- 6 (1) ~~Dismiss the delinquency proceedings against the child and order the~~
7 ~~release of the child to the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian upon~~
8 ~~conditions considered appropriate by the court;~~
- 9 (2) ~~Suspend the delinquency proceedings against the child for a period of up to~~
10 ~~one year and order services be provided to the child as an outpatient or~~
11 ~~inpatient, by commitment to an institution for persons with intellectual~~
12 ~~disabilities or mental illness; or~~
- 13 (3) ~~Dismiss the delinquency proceedings and direct that child in need of~~
14 ~~protection proceedings be initiated.~~

15 **SECTION 5.** Chapter 27-20.5 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as
16 follows:

17 **27-20.5-01. Definitions.**

- 18 1. "Fitness to proceed" means sufficient present ability to consult with counsel and assist
19 in preparing the minor's defense with a reasonable degree of rational understanding or
20 a rational and factual understanding of the nature of the offense and delinquency
21 proceedings against the minor. A lack of fitness to proceed may result from the
22 presence of any condition, including mental illness, mental disorder, developmental
23 disability, or developmental immaturity. Except as specifically provided otherwise, this
24 definition applies to a minor who is alleged to be under the court's jurisdiction in
25 accordance with section 27-20.2-03.
- 26 2. "Minor" means an individual who is:
- 27 a. Under the age of eighteen years and is not married; or
- 28 b. Eighteen years of age or older with respect to a delinquent act committed while
29 under the age of eighteen years, and not married, unless an offense is
30 transferred under section 27-20.4-21.

- 1 3. "Remediation" means the process of providing learning opportunities, services, and
2 support to achieve fitness to proceed.
- 3 4. "Remediation provider" means an individual certified with the department of health and
4 human services to provide remediation services for minors.
- 5 5. "Tier 1a mental health professional" is a psychiatrist licensed under chapter 43-17 or a
6 psychologist licensed under chapter 43-32.

7 **27-20.5-02. Age.**

- 8 1. An individual under the age of ten years is deemed incapable of commission of an
9 offense defined by the constitution or statutes of this state.
- 10 2. An individual ten years of age or older may be assessed for mental fitness or capacity
11 under this chapter.

12 **27-20.5-03. Motion for fitness to proceed examination.**

- 13 1. The court may order on its own motion, or at the request of the minor, the minor's
14 parent, legal guardian, legal custodian, or attorney, or the prosecuting attorney, a
15 fitness to proceed examination to determine whether the minor is fit to proceed if the
16 minor is the subject of a delinquency petition in the court or if the minor is under the
17 court's jurisdiction under section 27-20.2-03. The minor's fitness to proceed may be
18 raised by the court before which the proceedings are pending or being held, or by
19 motion of a party, at any time during the proceeding.
- 20 2. If the minor's fitness to proceed is raised, adjudication may not occur until after a
21 determination is made on the fitness of the minor to proceed in accordance with this
22 chapter.

23 **27-20.5-04. Use of previous findings and records - Deflection.**

24 A minor who is found to lack fitness to proceed due to previous judicial findings of lack of
25 fitness to proceed or considerations from school, medical, or other records within the last twelve
26 months may have the delinquency proceedings dismissed before a fitness to proceed
27 examination or remediation services are administered.

28 **27-20.5-05. Due process.**

- 29 1. If the minor's fitness to proceed is raised, adjudication may not occur until after a
30 determination is made except the filing of a delinquency petition, until counsel is

- 1 appointed and notified in accordance with section 27-20.2-12 and the minor is found to
2 have the mental capacity to proceed.
- 3 2. After the case proceeds to adjudication or the minor is found to lack fitness to proceed,
4 the court shall order all of the reports that are submitted under this chapter to be
5 closed to the public. The court may order the reports be opened for inspection only:
- 6 a. For further fitness to proceed or criminal responsibility examination;
7 b. For statistical analysis;
8 c. If the records are considered to be necessary to assist in mental health treatment
9 ordered according to the mental health code;
10 d. For data gathering;
11 e. For scientific study or other legitimate research;
12 f. To the state's attorney or minor's counsel for the purpose of an active court case
13 subject to the prior evaluation; and
14 g. To an employee or agent of the division of juvenile services or the department of
15 health and human services, if necessary in the performance of the employee's or
16 agent's duty.
- 17 3. If the court orders a report to be open for the purpose of de-identified statistical
18 analysis, data gathering, or scientific study, the report must remain confidential.
- 19 4. Any incriminating statement made by a minor to the tier 1a mental health professional
20 as part of a fitness to proceed examination may not be used against the minor over
21 objection in any proceeding.

22 **27-20.5-06. Fitness to proceed examination.**

- 23 1. If there is reason to doubt the minor's fitness to proceed, the court shall order the
24 minor to be examined by a tier 1a mental health professional.
- 25 2. This section does not prohibit any party from retaining the party's own qualified tier 1a
26 mental health professional to conduct additional evaluations at the party's own
27 expense.
- 28 3. The fitness to proceed examination must be conducted in the least restrictive
29 environment.

- 1 4. The court shall order the prosecuting attorney, minor's attorney, and juvenile court staff
2 to submit any information considered relevant to the fitness to proceed examination to
3 the tier 1a mental health professional, including:
4 a. The names and addresses of all attorneys involved;
5 b. Information about the alleged offense; and
6 c. Any information about the minor's background which is in the prosecuting
7 attorney's possession.
- 8 5. Except as prohibited by federal law, the court shall require the attorneys and juvenile
9 court staff to provide any available records regarding the minor and any other
10 information relevant to the examination to the tier 1a mental health professional,
11 including:
12 a. Psychiatric records;
13 b. School records;
14 c. Medical records; and
15 d. Child protective services records.
- 16 6. The requirement to provide records or information under subsections 4 and 5 does not
17 limit, waive, or abrogate the work product doctrine or the attorney-client privilege, and
18 release of records and information under subsections 4 and 5 is subject to the work
19 product doctrine and the attorney-client privilege.
- 20 7. The fitness to proceed examination must occur within fifteen days from receipt of
21 materials identified in subsections 4 and 5 and notice of entry of the order served on
22 the tier 1a mental health professional.
23 a. The court may grant an additional seven days to complete the examination if
24 good cause is shown.
25 b. The materials required in subsections 4 and 5 must be disclosed
26 contemporaneously with the order.
27 c. The tier 1a mental health professional shall notify the court and request any
28 missing or additional information within seventy-two hours of receiving this
29 information, and the attorneys and juvenile court staff have seven days to send
30 the information to the tier 1a mental health professional.

- 1 8. A tier 1a mental health professional who conducts a fitness to proceed examination
2 shall submit a written report to the court no later than fifteen days from completing the
3 fitness to proceed examination. The report must include:
- 4 a. A description of the nature, content, and extent of the examination, including:
5 (1) A description of the assessment procedure, technique, and test used;
6 (2) Medical, educational, and court records reviewed; and
7 (3) Social, clinical, developmental, and available legal history.
- 8 b. A clinical assessment that includes:
9 (1) A mental status examination;
10 (2) The diagnosis and functional impact of mental illness, developmental
11 disability, or cognitive impairment. If the minor is taking medication, the
12 impact of the medication on the minor's mental state and behavior;
13 (3) An assessment of the minor's intelligence and maturity level, when relevant;
14 (4) The minor's age, developmental state, and decisionmaking abilities; and
15 (5) Whether the minor has any other factor that affects fitness to proceed.
- 16 c. A description of abilities and deficits in the following mental competency functions
17 related to the minor's fitness to proceed:
- 18 (1) The ability to factually and rationally understand and appreciate the nature
19 and object of the proceedings, including the ability to:
- 20 (a) Understand the role of the participants in the court process, including
21 the roles of the judge, the minor's attorney, the prosecuting attorney,
22 the probation officer, witnesses, and the jury, and to understand the
23 adversarial nature of the process;
- 24 (b) Appreciate the offense and understand the seriousness of the offense;
25 (c) Understand and realistically appraise the likely outcomes; and
26 (d) Extend thinking into the future.
- 27 (2) The ability to render meaningful assistance to the minor's attorney in the
28 preparation of the case, including:
- 29 (a) The ability to disclose to an attorney a reasonably coherent
30 description of facts and events pertaining to the charge, as perceived
31 by the minor;

- 1 (b) The ability to consider the impact of the minor's action on others;
2 (c) Verbal articulation abilities or the ability to express himself or herself in
3 a reasonable and coherent manner;
4 (d) Logical decisionmaking abilities, including multifactored problem
5 solving or the ability to take several factors into consideration in
6 making a decision;
7 (e) The ability to reason about available options by weighing the
8 consequences, including distinguishing between a not guilty and guilty
9 plea, weighing pleas, dispositions, waivers, and strategies; and
10 (f) The ability to display appropriate courtroom behavior and testify
11 relevantly.
- 12 9. The tier 1a mental health professional shall provide the court with a written report
13 about the minor's fitness to proceed. If the tier 1a mental health professional
14 determines the minor lacks fitness to proceed, the tier 1a mental health professional
15 shall comment on the nature of any psychiatric or psychological disorder or cognitive
16 impairment, the prognosis, and the available services needed to remediate the minor
17 to fitness, if possible, within a projected time frame.
- 18 10. The court shall provide copies of the written report to the minor's attorney, the
19 prosecuting attorney, the parents' attorney and any guardian ad litem for the minor as
20 soon as possible.

21 **27-20.5-07. Fitness to proceed hearing.**

- 22 1. The court shall hold a hearing to determine if the minor is fit to proceed no later than
23 ten days after the report is filed under section 27-20.5-06. At the hearing, the
24 prosecution and defense have the right to summon and cross-examine any individual
25 responsible for the report and introduce other evidence regarding the minor's mental
26 condition or may submit the matter by written stipulation based on the filed report.
- 27 2. If the court finds the minor lacks fitness to proceed and that there is a substantial
28 likelihood the minor will not attain fitness during the period of the remediation order,
29 the court shall proceed to disposition under section 27-20.5-09.
- 30 3. The tier 1a mental health professional may appear via reliable electronic means
31 unless objected to by the parties.

1 4. If the court finds the minor is fit to proceed, the delinquency proceedings must
2 proceed.

3 **27-20.5-08. Remediation.**

4 1. If the minor lacks fitness to proceed but the court finds the minor may be remediated
5 to fitness to proceed within the period of the remediation order:

6 a. The matter must be dismissed if the offense is an infraction or a class B
7 misdemeanor, except a class B misdemeanor under chapter 12.1-17; or

8 b. The court may dismiss the matter or suspend the proceedings against the minor
9 if the offense is a felony, class A misdemeanor, or class B misdemeanor under
10 chapter 12.1-17.

11 2. If the proceedings are suspended because the minor lacks fitness to proceed but the
12 court finds the minor may be remediated to fitness within the period of the remediation
13 order, then:

14 a. Before issuing a remediation order, the court shall hold a hearing to determine
15 the least restrictive available environment for completion of the remediation.

16 b. The court may issue a remediation order that is valid for sixty days from the date
17 of the court order finding the child incompetent or until one of the following
18 occurs, whichever occurs first:

19 (1) The tier 1a mental health professional, based on information provided by the
20 remediation provider, submits a report that the minor has regained fitness or
21 there is no substantial likelihood the minor will regain fitness within the
22 period of the order; or

23 (2) The delinquency proceedings are dismissed.

24 c. Following issuance of the remediation order, the remediation provider, who must
25 be separate and distinct from the tier 1a mental health professional, shall submit
26 a report to the court and the tier 1a mental health professional which includes the
27 information required under section 27-20.5-06. The report must be submitted to
28 the court and the tier 1a mental health professional no later than fourteen days
29 before the expiration of the sixty-day order or sooner if:

30 (1) The remediation provider determines the minor no longer lacks fitness to
31 proceed; or

1 (2) The remediation provider determines there is no substantial probability the
2 minor will be fit to proceed within the period of the order.

3 3. No later than fourteen days before the expiration of the initial sixty-day order, the
4 remediation provider may recommend to the court and the tier 1a mental health
5 professional that the remediation order be renewed by the court for another sixty days,
6 if there is a substantial probability the minor will be fit to proceed within the period of
7 that renewed remediation order. The remediation provider shall include a report of
8 progress a minor made in remediation services which demonstrates the minor is likely
9 to be found fit to proceed if a renewal is ordered. The remediation order and any
10 renewed remediation order may not exceed a total of one hundred twenty days.

11 **27-20.5-09. Disposition.**

- 12 1. Except as otherwise provided in this section, upon receipt of a report by the tier 1a
13 mental health professional that the minor lacks fitness to proceed and there is a
14 substantial likelihood the minor is unable to be remediated within the period of the
15 remediation order, the court may:
- 16 a. Dismiss the delinquency proceedings and release the minor to the minor's
17 parent, legal guardian, or legal custodian; or
- 18 b. Retain jurisdiction and release the minor to the minor's parent, legal guardian, or
19 legal custodian subject to mental health treatment or services under
20 subsection 2.
- 21 2. The court may in its discretion order mental health services or other available services
22 from a mental health provider be provided to the minor by a community mental health
23 services program, the department of health and human services, or another
24 appropriate mental health services provider, subject to the availability of inpatient or
25 outpatient care, for a period not to exceed sixty days.
- 26 a. The court retains jurisdiction over the minor throughout the duration of the order
27 and the juvenile court officer may assist with referrals, the assessment process,
28 and reporting to the court.
- 29 b. The entity providing services under this subsection shall determine necessary
30 mental health treatment or services and continue to provide mental health

- 1 treatment or services for the duration of the period of mental health treatment or
2 services ordered by the court.
- 3 3. No later than fourteen days before the expiration of the order for mental health
4 treatment or services under this subsection or subsection 2, a report must be provided
5 to the court regarding the minor. The court shall review the report and:
- 6 a. Renew the order for another period of mental health treatment or services not to
7 exceed sixty days. The order for mental health treatment or services and any
8 renewed order may not exceed a total of one hundred twenty days; or
- 9 b. Determine custody of the minor and dismiss the delinquency proceedings against
10 the minor.
- 11 4. If release to the minor's parent, legal guardian, or legal custodian is determined
12 inappropriate under subsection 1, the court may dismiss the delinquency proceeding
13 and enter an order directing a child in need of protection petition to be filed, order a
14 shelter care hearing be held, or enter a shelter care order.

15 **SECTION 6. APPROPRIATION - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES -**
16 **JUVENILE FITNESS TO PROCEED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.** There is appropriated out
17 of any moneys in the general fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of
18 \$4,580,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, and the sum of \$1,000,000 from other
19 funds derived from federal funds, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the
20 department of health and human services for the purpose of defraying the costs associated with
21 implementing and administering section 5 of this Act, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025,
22 and ending June 30, 2027.

23 **SECTION 7. EFFECTIVE DATE.** Section 5 of this Act becomes effective on August 1, 2026.