

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2025

**H.B. 507**  
**Mar 25, 2025**  
**HOUSE PRINCIPAL CLERK**

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HOUSE BILL DRH50019-MGfa-101A

Short Title: The Children First Act.

(Public)

Sponsors: Representative Prather.

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT PRIORITIZING THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN BY EXPANDING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE FOR NORTH CAROLINA FAMILIES; ESTABLISHING AN EMPLOYER-PROVIDED CHILD CARE CREDIT; IMPLEMENTING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND LICENSING REFORM STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE SHORTAGE; ENHANCING CHILD HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTECTIONS; ADDRESSING INFANT AND FETAL MORTALITY PREVENTION; ESTABLISHING A CHILD CARE INNOVATION TASK FORCE TO IMPROVE THE CHILD CARE LANDSCAPE IN NORTH CAROLINA; AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THESE PURPOSES.

Whereas, children in North Carolina are facing unprecedented threats to their safety, privacy, education, and overall well-being, requiring a bold policy response to protect them from economic insecurity, digital exploitation, harmful substances, and violence; and

Whereas, the cost of raising children has skyrocketed, with child care, housing, healthcare, and education expenses outpacing wages, forcing many families to make impossible financial choices and pushing parents—especially mothers—out of the workforce; and

Whereas, predatory social media platforms and digital corporations are deliberately targeting children with addictive algorithms, manipulative content, and intrusive data collection, exposing them to mental health crises, identity theft, and exploitation without parental consent or oversight; and

Whereas, children are being tracked, monetized, and manipulated online, leading to increased rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and social isolation, creating the urgent need for strict digital privacy protections, algorithm regulations, and a ban on data mining of minors; and

Whereas, youth vaping, cannabis exposure, and synthetic drug use have surged, with over one-third of North Carolina high school students reporting vape use, and an increasing number of elementary-aged children being introduced to nicotine, THC derivatives, and other substances especially harmful to children; and

Whereas, firearm-related deaths among children have more than doubled since 2013, with over seventy-nine percent (79%) of guns found on school campuses originating from improperly stored firearms, making safe storage laws and firearm safety education a critical public health necessity; and

Whereas, youth homelessness is rising at alarming rates, with more than 28,000 students statewide experiencing housing instability, making it nearly impossible for these children to focus on their education, well-being, and future career paths; and



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1 Whereas, childhood food insecurity remains a crisis, with more than twenty percent  
2 (20%) of North Carolina children living in households that cannot afford sufficient nutrition,  
3 leading to lifelong negative health outcomes and academic struggles; and

4 Whereas, violent crime and exploitation targeting children are on the rise, with human  
5 traffickers, gangs, and online predators increasingly preying on minors, requiring stronger law  
6 enforcement collaboration and parental empowerment to protect our children; and

7 Whereas, every dollar invested in early childhood development, education, and safety  
8 yields an estimated seven-dollar (\$7.00) return in long-term economic benefits, including higher  
9 graduation rates, increased workforce productivity, and lower crime rates, proving that protecting  
10 children is not just a moral obligation but an economic necessity; and

11 Whereas, North Carolina has an opportunity to be a national leader in child safety,  
12 privacy protections, and family empowerment, ensuring that our State prioritizes parental rights,  
13 safeguards children from corporate and government overreach, and builds a future where every  
14 child can thrive; Now, therefore,

15 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

16  
17 **PART I. TITLE AND PURPOSE**

18 **SECTION 1.1.** This act shall be known as "The Children First Act."

19 **SECTION 1.2.** The purposes of this act are as follows:

- 20 (1) To expand child care affordability and access for North Carolina families.
- 21 (2) To increase child care workforce development activities and streamline the  
22 licensing of child care workers.
- 23 (3) To strengthen child health and safety protections with respect to social media,  
24 substance use, firearm safety, and access to early childhood mental health.
- 25 (4) To incentivize employer-sponsored child care initiatives.
- 26 (5) To reduce child care deserts in rural and underserved communities.
- 27 (6) To support public-private partnerships for sustainable child care solutions.

28  
29 **PART II. EXPANSION OF CHILD CARE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS**

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31 **EXPANSION OF CHILD CARE SUBSIDY ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND**  
32 **ENHANCEMENT OF CHILD CARE SUBSIDY RATES**

33 **SECTION 2.1.** Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated from the General Fund  
34 to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early  
35 Education, the sum of fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000) in recurring funds for each year of the  
36 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be allocated to the North Carolina Child Care Subsidy Program to  
37 do all of the following:

- 38 (1) To increase the maximum gross annual income for initial eligibility under the  
39 Program to eighty-five percent (85%) of State Median Income (SMI).
- 40 (2) To adjust the sliding scale used to determine the percentage of child care costs  
41 paid by families participating in the Program. Copayments on the sliding scale  
42 shall be graduated based on family size and household income, starting from  
43 two hundred percent (200%) of the federal poverty level and increasing  
44 through eighty-five percent (85%) of SMI.
- 45 (3) To increase child care subsidy rates to reflect the true cost of providing quality  
46 child care in North Carolina. The increase funded pursuant to this section shall  
47 be based on the most recent North Carolina child care market rate survey  
48 conducted in 2023.

49  
50 **CHILD CARE FACILITY GRANTS**

1           **SECTION 2.2.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
2 of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE),  
3 the sum of fifteen million dollars (\$15,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for each year of the  
4 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be used to provide grants for start-up costs associated with the  
5 establishment of new child care facilities in rural or underserved areas of the State, particularly  
6 those areas within a child care desert or low performing and high poverty district. The DCDEE  
7 shall establish an application process and eligibility criteria for awarding grants under this section  
8 and shall award grants under this section pursuant to criteria established by the DCDEE.

9           **SECTION 2.2.(b)** By December 1, 2026, and by December 1, 2027, the DCDEE  
10 shall report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the  
11 Fiscal Research Division on any grants awarded pursuant to this section. The report shall include  
12 at least all of the following information:

- 13           (1) The total number and amount of grants awarded under this section.
- 14           (2) For each grant, the identity and a brief description of the grantee, the amount  
15           of the grant award, the grantee's stated purpose for the grant, and the location  
16           of the new child care facility funded by the grant.
- 17           (3) A status report on the operational status of the child care facility funded by  
18           the grant.

## 19 20 **CHILD CARE FACILITIES INVESTMENT FUND AND LOAN PROGRAM**

21           **SECTION 2.3.(a)** Fund Established; Purpose. – The Child Care Facilities  
22 Investment Fund is created as a nonreverting special fund in the Department of Commerce. The  
23 Fund shall operate as a revolving fund consisting of funds appropriated to, or otherwise received  
24 by, the Child Care Facilities Investment Program created by subsection (b) of this section and all  
25 funds received as repayment of the principal of or interest on a loan made from the Fund. The  
26 State Treasurer is the custodian of the Fund and shall invest its assets in accordance with  
27 G.S. 147-69.2 and G.S. 147-69.3. Moneys in the Fund shall not be used for any purpose other  
28 than to finance the costs of expanding or upgrading existing child care facilities in rural or  
29 underserved areas of the State, as provided in subsection (b) of this section.

30           **SECTION 2.3.(b)** Program Established; Purpose. – There is established the Child  
31 Care Facilities Investment Program (Program) within the Department of Commerce. Within the  
32 funds available in the Child Care Facilities Investment Fund created by subsection (a) of this  
33 section, the Program shall provide for loans at below-market interest rates with structured  
34 repayment terms to finance the costs of expanding or upgrading existing child care facilities in  
35 rural or underserved areas of the State, particularly those areas in a child care desert or low  
36 performing and high poverty district.

37           **SECTION 2.3.(c)** Administration. – The Department of Commerce shall administer  
38 the Program and has the following duties and responsibilities:

- 39           (1) Establishing an application period and a process for submitting an application  
40           for a loan under this Program.
- 41           (2) Assessing applications submitted by an applicant for a loan under the  
42           Program.
- 43           (3) Evaluating an applicant's ability to repay the loan.
- 44           (4) Negotiating the terms of a proposed loan agreement.
- 45           (5) Determining the security interests necessary to enforce repayment of the loan.
- 46           (6) Implementing approved loan agreements, including monitoring repayment  
47           and collection.
- 48           (7) Any other duties and responsibilities necessary to the implementation of the  
49           Program and enforcement of the loan agreements under the Program.

50           **SECTION 2.3.(d)** Annually by December 1, beginning December 1, 2027, the  
51 Department of Commerce shall report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental

1 Operations, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, and the  
2 Fiscal Research Division on any loans provided under the Child Care Facilities Investment  
3 Program authorized by this section. The report shall include at least all of the following  
4 information with respect to the preceding fiscal year:

- 5 (1) The total amount of loans approved under the Program.
- 6 (2) For each loan approved, the identity of the borrower, the amount of the loan,  
7 and the borrower's stated purpose for the loan.
- 8 (3) A status report on the activities funded by the loan.

9 **SECTION 2.3.(e)** Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated from the General  
10 Fund to the Department of Commerce the sum of twenty million dollars (\$20,000,000) in  
11 recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be allocated to the Child Care  
12 Facilities Investment Fund created by subsection (a) of this section.

### 13 **EMPLOYER-PROVIDED CHILD CARE CREDIT**

14 **SECTION 2.4.(a)** Article 4 of Chapter 105 of the General Statutes is amended by  
15 adding a new Part to read:

16 "Part 6. Employer-Provided Child Care Credit.

#### 17 **"§ 105-163.20. Employer-provided child care credit.**

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

19 (1) Code. – Defined in G.S. 105-228.90.

20 (2) Qualifying business. – A business subject to income tax under this Article.

21 (b) Credit. – A qualifying business that is allowed a credit against federal income tax for  
22 qualified child care expenditures under section 45F of the Code shall be allowed as a credit  
23 against the tax imposed by Part 1, Part 1A, or Part 2 of this Article, as appropriate, the amount  
24 allowed under section 45F of the Code. In order to claim the credit allowed by this section, the  
25 taxpayer must provide with the tax return the information required by the Secretary.

26 (c) Limitations. – A nonresident or part-year resident who claims the credit allowed by  
27 this section shall reduce the amount of the credit by multiplying it by the fraction calculated under  
28 G.S. 105-153.4(b) or (c), as appropriate. No credit shall be allowed under this section for amounts  
29 deducted in calculating North Carolina taxable income. The credit allowed by this section may  
30 not exceed the amount of tax imposed by Part 1, Part 1A, or Part 2 of this Article for the taxable  
31 year reduced by the sum of all credits allowable, except for payments of tax made by or on behalf  
32 of the taxpayer."

33 **SECTION 2.4.(b)** This section is effective for taxable years beginning on or after  
34 January 1, 2026.

### 35 **PART III. CHILD HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTECTIONS**

#### 36 **MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR DOULA SERVICES**

37 **SECTION 3.1.(a)** The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of  
38 Health Benefits (DHB), shall seek approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
39 (CMS) to implement Medicaid coverage of certain healthcare services provided by a doula. DHB  
40 shall develop the parameters of services to be covered, including updating applicable clinical  
41 coverage policies, developing appropriate reimbursement for covered services provided by a  
42 doula, and determining provider credentialing requirements for participation in the NC Medicaid  
43 program. The coverage required by this section shall be implemented as soon as practicable upon  
44 approval by CMS. DHB shall report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid  
45 no later than March 1, 2026, regarding the details of the Medicaid coverage of healthcare services  
46 provided by a doula, the specific reimbursement for these services, and the estimated recurring  
47 cost to the State of providing this coverage.  
48  
49  
50

1           **SECTION 3.1.(b)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
2 of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Benefits, the sum of one million dollars  
3 (\$1,000,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to implement the  
4 Medicaid-related changes outlined in this act. These funds shall provide a State match for one  
5 million eight hundred twenty-six thousand dollars (\$1,826,000) in recurring federal funds for  
6 each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium, and those federal funds are appropriated to the  
7 Division of Health Benefits to pay for costs associated with the Medicaid-related changes  
8 outlined in this act.

9           **SECTION 3.1.(c)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
10 of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, the sum of five hundred thousand  
11 dollars (\$500,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be used  
12 to provide training, support services, and technical assistance to the doula workforce.

13           **SECTION 3.1.(d)** Subsections (b) and (c) of this section are effective July 1, 2025.  
14 The remainder of this section is effective when it becomes law.

## 15 16 **YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION**

17           **SECTION 3.2.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
18 of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, the sum of  
19 one million dollars (\$1,000,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal  
20 biennium to be used to provide mental health training for child care workers, including suicide  
21 prevention strategies.

22           **SECTION 3.2.(b)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
23 of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, the sum of  
24 two million five hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000) in nonrecurring funds for each year of  
25 the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be used to provide for telehealth services for mental health  
26 screenings in child care centers.

27           **SECTION 3.2.(c)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
28 of Public Instruction the sum of sixty-five million four hundred ninety thousand seven hundred  
29 six dollars (\$65,490,706) in recurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to increase the School  
30 Health Personnel Allotment as established in G.S. 115C-316.5.

31           **SECTION 3.2.(d)** This section is effective July 1, 2025.

## 32 33 **CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY LAW REVISIONS**

34           **SECTION 3.3.(a)** G.S. 20-137.1 reads as rewritten:

### 35 **"§ 20-137.1. Child restraint systems required.**

36           (a) Every driver who is transporting one or more passengers of less than 16 years of age  
37 shall have all such passengers properly secured in a child passenger restraint system or seat belt  
38 which meets federal standards applicable at the time of its manufacture. For purposes of this  
39 section, a "child passenger restraint system" means any device designed to restrain or position a  
40 child in a motor vehicle, including a booster seat.

41           (a1) A child less than eight years of age and less than 80 pounds in weight 57 inches in  
42 height shall be properly secured in a weight appropriate height and weight appropriate child  
43 passenger restraint system. In vehicles equipped with an active passenger side front air bag, if  
44 the vehicle has a rear seat, a child less than five years of age and less than 40 pounds in weight  
45 shall be properly secured in a rear seat, unless the child restraint system is designed for use with  
46 air bags. If system as follows:

47           (1) Beginning as a newborn, a child shall be properly secured in a rear-facing  
48 child passenger restraint system with transition to a forward-facing system  
49 according to the manufacturer's instructions related to the child's height and  
50 weight requirements for use of the system as indicated by the federally  
51 required label on the car seat which states those requirements.

- 1           (2)    The child shall be properly secured in a child passenger restraint system in a
- 2           rear seat unless at least one of the following exceptions applies:
- 3           a.       The vehicle does not have a rear seat. This exception shall not apply
- 4           to a rear-facing child passenger restraint system being used in the front
- 5           seat of a motor vehicle that has an active front air bag.
- 6           b.       The vehicle is not equipped with an active passenger-side front air bag.
- 7           c.       The child passenger restraint system is designed for use with front air
- 8           bags.

9           (a2)   A driver may satisfy the requirements of this this section by properly securing a child  
 10 passenger with a seat belt as follows:

- 11           (1)    Notwithstanding subsection (a1) of this section, if no seating position
- 12           equipped with a lap and shoulder belt to properly secure the
- 13           weight-appropriate child passenger restraint system is available, a child less
- 14           than eight years of age and ~~between at least 40 and 80~~ pounds may be
- 15           restrained by a properly fitted lap belt only.
- 16           (2)    A child who is at least 8 years of age or 57 inches in height may be restrained
- 17           by a properly secured lap and shoulder belt. For purposes of this subdivision,
- 18           a lap and shoulder belt are properly secured if, when fastened, all of the
- 19           following apply:
- 20           a.       The lap belt fits across the child's thighs and hips and not across the
- 21           child's abdomen.
- 22           b.       The shoulder belt crosses the child's body diagonally at approximately
- 23           the mid-point of the child's shoulder and the center of the child's chest.
- 24           c.       The child is able to sit with the child's back straight against the
- 25           vehicle's seat back cushion and with the child's knees bent over the
- 26           vehicle's seat edge without slouching.

27           ...."

28           **SECTION 3.3.(b)** This act becomes effective December 1, 2025, and applies to  
 29 offenses committed on or after that date.

30  
 31 **FIREARM SAFE STORAGE AWARENESS**

32           **SECTION 3.4.(a)** G.S. 14-315.1 reads as rewritten:

33 **"§ 14-315.1. Storage of firearms to protect minors.**

34           (a) Any person who resides in the same premises as a minor, owns or possesses a firearm,  
 35 and stores or leaves the firearm ~~(i) in a condition that the firearm can be discharged and (ii) in a~~  
 36 manner that the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor would be able to  
 37 gain access to the firearm, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor if a minor gains access to the  
 38 firearm without the lawful permission of the minor's parents or a person having charge of the  
 39 minor and the ~~minor~~ minor does any of the following:

- 40           (1) Possesses it in violation of ~~G.S. 14-269.2(b);~~ G.S. 14-269.2(b).
- 41           (2) Exhibits it in a public place in a careless, angry, or threatening
- 42           ~~manner;~~ manner.
- 43           (3) Causes personal injury or death with it not in self ~~defense;~~ or defense.
- 44           (4) Uses it in the commission of a crime.

45           ...."

46           **SECTION 3.4.(b)** G.S. 110-102 reads as rewritten:

47 **"§ 110-102. Information for parents.**

48           The Secretary shall provide to each operator of a child care facility a summary of this Article  
 49 and G.S. 14-315.1 for the parents, guardian, or full-time custodian of each child receiving child  
 50 care in the facility to be distributed by the operator. Operators of child care facilities shall provide  
 51 a copy of the summary to each child's parent, guardian, or full-time custodian before the child is

1 enrolled in the child care facility. The child's parent, guardian, or full-time custodian shall sign a  
 2 statement attesting that he or she received a copy of the summary before the child's enrollment.  
 3 The summary shall include the name and address of the Secretary and the address of the  
 4 Commission. The summary shall explain how parents may obtain information on individual child  
 5 care facilities maintained in public files by the Division of Child Development. The summary  
 6 shall also include a statement regarding the mandatory duty prescribed in G.S. 7B-301 of any  
 7 person suspecting child abuse or neglect has taken place in child care, or elsewhere, to report to  
 8 the county Department of Social Services. The statement shall include the definitions of child  
 9 abuse and neglect described in the Juvenile Code in G.S. 7B-101 and of child abuse described in  
 10 the Criminal Code in G.S. 14-318.2 and G.S. 14-318.4. The statement shall stress that this  
 11 reporting law does not require that the person reporting reveal the person's identity. The summary  
 12 shall also include a statement that the Department of Public Safety has additional resources on  
 13 best practices for firearm storage and safety.

14 The summary of this Article and G.S. 14-315.1 shall be posted with the facility's license in  
 15 accordance with G.S. 110-99. Religious-sponsored programs operating pursuant to G.S. 110-106  
 16 shall post the summary in a prominent place at all times so that it is easily reviewed by parents."

17 **SECTION 3.4.(c)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department  
 18 of Public Safety the sum of two million one hundred sixty thousand dollars (\$2,160,000) in  
 19 recurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to be used for costs associated with maintaining the  
 20 NC SAFE (Secure All Firearms Effectively) initiative.

21 **SECTION 3.4.(d)** Subsection (a) of this section becomes effective December 1,  
 22 2025, and applies to offenses committed on or after that date. Subsection (b) of this section  
 23 becomes effective December 1, 2025. The remainder of this section becomes effective July 1,  
 24 2025.

## 25 26 **RAISING OF MINIMUM AGE TO ACCESS TOBACCO AND VAPOR PRODUCTS TO** 27 **ALIGN WITH FEDERAL LAW**

28 **SECTION 3.5.(a)** G.S. 14-313 reads as rewritten:

29 "**§ 14-313. Youth access to tobacco products, alternative nicotine products, vapor products,**  
30 **and cigarette wrapping papers.**

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

32 ...

33 (2) Proof of age. – A drivers license or other photographic identification that  
 34 includes the bearer's date of birth that purports to establish that the person is  
 35 ~~18-21~~ years of age or older.

36 ...

37 (b) Sale or Distribution to Persons Under the Age of ~~18-21~~ Years. – If any person shall  
 38 distribute, or aid, assist, or abet any other person in distributing tobacco products or cigarette  
 39 wrapping papers to any person under the age of ~~18-21~~ years, or if any person shall purchase  
 40 tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers on behalf of a person under the age of ~~18-21~~ years,  
 41 the person shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor; provided, however, that it shall not be  
 42 unlawful to distribute tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers to an employee when  
 43 required in the performance of the employee's duties. Retail distributors of tobacco products shall  
 44 prominently display near the point of sale a sign in letters at least five-eighths of an inch high  
 45 which states the following:

46 N.C. LAW STRICTLY PROHIBITS

47 THE PURCHASE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ALTERNATIVE NICOTINE PRODUCTS,  
 48 VAPOR PRODUCTS, AND CIGARETTE WRAPPING PAPERS

49 BY PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF ~~18-21~~.

50 PROOF OF AGE REQUIRED.

1 Failure to post the required sign shall be an infraction punishable by a fine of twenty-five dollars  
2 (\$25.00) for the first offense and seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) for each succeeding offense.

3 A person engaged in the sale of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers shall demand  
4 proof of age from a prospective purchaser if the person has reasonable grounds to believe that  
5 the prospective purchaser is under ~~18~~21 years of age. Failure to demand proof of age as required  
6 by this subsection is a Class 2 misdemeanor if in fact the prospective purchaser is under ~~18~~21  
7 years of age. Retail distributors of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers shall train their  
8 sales employees in the requirements of this law. Proof of any of the following shall be a defense  
9 to any action brought under this subsection:

10 (1) The defendant demanded, was shown, and reasonably relied upon proof of age  
11 in the case of a retailer, or any other documentary or written evidence of age  
12 in the case of a nonretailer.

13 (2) The defendant relied on the electronic system established and operated by the  
14 Division of Motor Vehicles pursuant to G.S. 20-37.02.

15 (3) The defendant relied on a biometric identification system that demonstrated  
16 (i) the purchaser's age to be at least the required age for the purchase and (ii)  
17 the purchaser had previously registered with the seller or seller's agent a  
18 drivers license, a special identification card issued under G.S. 20-37.7, a  
19 military identification card, or a passport showing the purchaser's date of birth  
20 and bearing a physical description of the person named on the card.

21 (b1) Distribution of Tobacco Products. – Tobacco products shall not be distributed in  
22 vending machines; provided, however, vending machines distributing tobacco products are  
23 permitted (i) in any establishment which is open only to persons ~~18~~21 years of age and older; or  
24 (ii) in any establishment if the vending machine is under the continuous control of the owner or  
25 licensee of the premises or an employee thereof and can be operated only upon activation by the  
26 owner, licensee, or employee prior to each purchase and the vending machine is not accessible  
27 to the public when the establishment is closed. The owner, licensee, or employee shall demand  
28 proof of age from a prospective purchaser if the person has reasonable grounds to believe that  
29 the prospective purchaser is under ~~18~~21 years of age. Failure to demand proof of age as required  
30 by this subsection is a Class 2 misdemeanor if in fact the prospective purchaser is under ~~18~~21  
31 years of age. Proof that the defendant demanded, was shown, and reasonably relied upon proof  
32 of age shall be a defense to any action brought under this subsection. Any person distributing  
33 tobacco products through vending machines in violation of this subsection shall be guilty of a  
34 Class 2 misdemeanor.

35 (b2) Internet Distribution of Tobacco Products. – A person engaged in the distribution of  
36 tobacco products through the Internet or other remote sales methods shall perform an age  
37 verification through an independent, third-party age verification service that compares  
38 information available from public records to the personal information entered by the individual  
39 during the ordering process to establish that the individual ordering the tobacco products is ~~18~~  
40 21 years of age or older.

41 (c) Purchase By Persons Under the Age of ~~18~~21 Years. – If any person under the age of  
42 ~~18~~21 years purchases or accepts receipt, or attempts to purchase or accept receipt, of tobacco  
43 products or cigarette wrapping papers, or presents or offers to any person any purported proof of  
44 age which is false, fraudulent, or not actually his or her own, for the purpose of purchasing or  
45 receiving any tobacco product or cigarette wrapping papers, the person shall be guilty of a Class  
46 2 misdemeanor; provided, however, that it shall not be unlawful for an employee to purchase or  
47 accept receipt of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers when required in the performance  
48 of the employee's duties.

49 (d) Sending or Assisting a Person [Less Than] ~~18~~21 Years to Purchase or Receive  
50 Tobacco Products or Cigarette Wrapping Papers. – If any person shall send a person less than ~~18~~  
51 21 years of age to purchase, acquire, receive, or attempt to purchase, acquire, or receive tobacco



1 products or cigarette wrapping papers, or if any person shall aid or abet a person who is less than  
2 ~~18-21~~ years of age in purchasing, acquiring, or receiving or attempting to purchase, acquire, or  
3 receive tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers, the person shall be guilty of a Class 2  
4 misdemeanor; provided, however, persons under the age of ~~18-21~~ may be enlisted by police or  
5 local sheriffs' departments to test compliance if the testing is under the direct supervision of that  
6 law enforcement department and written parental consent is provided; provided further, that the  
7 Department of Health and Human Services shall have the authority, pursuant to a written plan  
8 prepared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to use persons under ~~18-21~~ years of  
9 age in annual, random, unannounced inspections, provided that prior written parental consent is  
10 given for the involvement of these persons and that the inspections are conducted for the sole  
11 purpose of preparing a scientifically and methodologically valid statistical study of the extent of  
12 success the State has achieved in reducing the availability of tobacco products to persons under  
13 the age of ~~18-21~~, and preparing any report to the extent required by section 1926 of the federal  
14 Public Health Service Act (42 USC § 300x-26).

15 ...."

16 **SECTION 3.5.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2025, and applies to  
17 offenses committed on or after that date.

### 18 **LICENSING REQUIREMENT FOR RETAIL DEALERS OF VAPOR PRODUCTS**

19 **SECTION 3.6.(a)** G.S. 105-113.39A(a2) reads as rewritten:

20 "(a2) Vapor Products License. – A wholesale dealer or a retail dealer must obtain a vapor  
21 products license for all of the following locations:

- 22 (1) Each location where a wholesale dealer makes vapor products.
- 23 (2) Each location where a wholesale dealer or a retail dealer receives or stores  
24 non-tax-paid vapor products.
- 25 (3) Each location from where a retail dealer that is a delivery seller or a remote  
26 seller receives or stores non-tax-paid vapor products for delivery sales if the  
27 location is a location other than the location described in subdivision (2) of  
28 this subsection.
- 29 (4) Each location from where a retail dealer receives or stores tax-paid vapor  
30 products if the location is a location other than the location described in  
31 subdivision (2) of this subsection.

32 **SECTION 3.6.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2025.

### 33 **REGULATION OF INTOXICATING CANNABIS PRODUCT SALES**

34 **SECTION 3.7.(a)** Article 39 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes is amended by  
35 adding a new section to read:

36 "**§ 14-313.5. Youth access to cannabis products.**

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

- 38 (1) Cannabis product. – Hemp, hemp products, or marijuana, as defined in  
39 G.S. 90-87, legal to be sold or distributed in this State.
- 40 (2) Distribute. – To sell, furnish, give, or provide cannabis products to the  
41 ultimate consumer.
- 42 (3) Proof of age. – A drivers license or other photographic identification that  
43 includes the bearer's date of birth that purports to establish that the person is  
44 21 years of age or older.

45 (b) Sale or Distribution to Persons Under the Age of 21 Years. – If any person shall  
46 distribute, or aid, assist, or abet any other person in distributing cannabis products to any person  
47 under the age of 21 years, or if any person shall purchase cannabis products on behalf of a person  
48 under the age of 21 years, the person shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor. Retail distributors  
49  
50

1 of cannabis products shall prominently display near the point of sale a sign in letters at least  
2 five-eighths of an inch which states the following:

3 "N.C. LAW STRICTLY PROHIBITS  
4 THE PURCHASE OF CANNABIS PRODUCTS  
5 BY PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF 21.  
6 PROOF OF AGE REQUIRED."

7 Failure to post the required sign shall be an infraction punishable by a fine of twenty-five dollars  
8 (\$25.00) for the first offense and seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) for each succeeding offense.

9 (c) A person engaged in the sale of cannabis products shall demand proof of age from a  
10 prospective purchaser if the person has reasonable grounds to believe that the prospective  
11 purchaser is under 21 years of age. Failure to demand proof of age as required by this subsection  
12 is a Class 2 misdemeanor if in fact the prospective purchaser is under 21 years of age. Retail  
13 distributors of cannabis products shall train their sales employees in the requirements of this law.  
14 Proof of any of the following shall be a defense to any action brought under this subsection:

15 (1) The defendant demanded, was shown, and reasonably relied upon proof of age  
16 in the case of a retailer, or any other documentary or written evidence of age  
17 in the case of a nonretailer.

18 (2) The defendant relied on the electronic system established and operated by the  
19 Division of Motor Vehicles pursuant to G.S. 20-37.02.

20 (3) The defendant relied on a biometric identification system that demonstrated  
21 (i) the purchaser's age to be at least the required age for the purchase and (ii)  
22 the purchaser had previously registered with the seller or seller's agent a  
23 drivers license, a special identification card issued under G.S. 20-37.7, a  
24 military identification card, or a passport showing the purchaser's date of birth  
25 and bearing a physical description of the person named on the card.

26 (d) Distribution of Cannabis Products. – Cannabis products shall not be distributed in  
27 vending machines; provided, however, vending machines distributing cannabis products are  
28 permitted (i) in any establishment which is open only to persons 21 years of age and older or (ii)  
29 in any establishment if the vending machine is under the continuous control of the owner or  
30 licensee of the premises or an employee thereof and can be operated only upon activation by the  
31 owner, licensee, or employee prior to each purchase and the vending machine is not accessible  
32 to the public when the establishment is closed. The owner, licensee, or employee shall demand  
33 proof of age from a prospective purchaser if the person has reasonable grounds to believe that  
34 the prospective purchaser is under 21 years of age. Failure to demand proof of age as required by  
35 this subsection is a Class 2 misdemeanor if in fact the prospective purchaser is under 21 years of  
36 age. Proof that the defendant demanded, was shown, and reasonably relied upon proof of age  
37 shall be a defense to any action brought under this subsection. Any person distributing cannabis  
38 products through vending machines in violation of this subsection shall be guilty of a Class 2  
39 misdemeanor.

40 (e) Internet Distribution of Cannabis Products. – A person engaged in the distribution of  
41 cannabis products through the internet or other remote sales methods shall perform an age  
42 verification through an independent, third-party age verification service that compares  
43 information available from public records to the personal information entered by the individual  
44 during the ordering process to establish that the individual ordering the cannabis products is 21  
45 years of age or older.

46 (f) Purchase By Persons Under the Age of 21 Years. – If any person under the age of 21  
47 years purchases or accepts receipt, or attempts to purchase or accept receipt, of cannabis products,  
48 or presents or offers to any person any purported proof of age which is false, fraudulent, or not  
49 actually his or her own, for the purpose of purchasing or receiving any cannabis product, the  
50 person shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor; provided, however, that it shall not be unlawful

1 for an employee to purchase or accept receipt of cannabis products when required in the  
2 performance of the employee's duties.

3 (g) Deferred Prosecution or Conditional Discharge. – Notwithstanding  
4 G.S. 15A-1341(a1) or G.S. 15A-1341(a4), any person charged with a misdemeanor under this  
5 section shall be qualified for deferred prosecution or a conditional discharge pursuant to Article  
6 82 of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes provided the defendant has not previously been placed  
7 on probation for a violation of this section and so states under oath."

8 **SECTION 3.7.(b)** Subsection (a) of this section is effective December 1, 2025, and  
9 applies to offenses committed on or after that date.

10 **SECTION 3.8.(a)** Article 39 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes is amended by  
11 adding a new section to read:

12 **"§ 14-313.6. Special packaging of cannabis products.**

13 Cannabis products, as defined in G.S. 14-314, sold or distributed in this State must be sold or  
14 distributed in child-resistant packaging, which must be designed or constructed to be significantly  
15 difficult for children under 5 years of age to open and not difficult for normal adults to use  
16 properly as defined by 16 C.F.R. § 1700.20."

17 **SECTION 3.8.(b)** Subsection (a) of this section is effective October 1, 2025, and  
18 applies to products sold on or after that date.

19 **SECTION 3.9.(a)** Article 39 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes is amended by  
20 adding a new section to read:

21 **"§ 14-313.7. Sale of cannabis products near schools or child care centers.**

22 No retail store selling cannabis products may operate within 1,000 yards of a public school  
23 or a nonpublic school as defined in Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39 of Chapter 115C of the General  
24 Statutes or a child care center as defined in G.S. 110-86."

25 **SECTION 3.9.(b)** Subsection (a) of this section is effective when it becomes law  
26 and applies to retail stores that open on or after that date.

27  
28 **ONLINE CHILD SAFETY PROTECTIONS**

29 **SECTION 3.10.(a)** Chapter 66 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new  
30 Article to read:

31 "Article 51A.

32 "Child Safety Online.

33 **"§ 66-504. Definition; findings.**

34 (a) For the purposes of this Article, "social media platform" means an online service or  
35 website with users in this State that enables users to create, share, and interact with content and  
36 to participate in social networking by connecting with other users.

37 (b) The General Assembly finds that:

38 (1) Predatory social media platforms and digital corporations are deliberately  
39 targeting children with addictive algorithms, manipulative content, and  
40 intrusive data collection, exposing them to mental health crises, identity theft,  
41 and exploitation without parental consent or oversight.

42 (2) Children are being tracked, monetized, and manipulated online, leading to  
43 increased rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and social isolation, creating  
44 the urgent need for strict digital privacy protections, algorithm regulations,  
45 and a ban on data mining of minors.

46 **"§ 66-505. Online child safety protections.**

47 (a) No person operating a social media platform shall knowingly employ or implement  
48 algorithmic features, notification systems, or interface designs specifically engineered to promote  
49 compulsive usage patterns among users in this State who are under 18 years of age.

50 (b) All of the following are unlawful when employed or implemented by a person  
51 operating a social media platform for any user in this State under 18 years of age:

- 1           (1) Infinite scroll mechanisms that continuously load content without  
2           user-initiated action.
- 3           (2) Autoplay features that present successive content without explicit user  
4           request.
- 5           (3) Variable reward mechanisms designed to increase engagement through  
6           unpredictable content delivery.
- 7           (4) Quantified social validation indicators that encourage compulsive checking  
8           behaviors.
- 9       (c) It is unlawful for a social media platform to do any of the following to any user in this  
10 State under 18 years of age:
- 11           (1) Collect, process, or store personal data of users under 18 years of age for  
12           behavioral profiling, targeted advertising, or commercial purposes without  
13           express, informed parental consent.
- 14           (2) Transfer or sell such data to third parties without explicit disclosure of the  
15           specific purposes and recipients or retain such data beyond the period  
16           necessary for the explicitly authorized purpose.
- 17           (3) Publish an annual Child Safety Transparency Report detailing the following:  
18           a. Measures implemented to protect minors from harmful content.  
19           b. Statistics on content moderation actions related to child safety.  
20           c. Resources allocated to child protection efforts.  
21           d. Response metrics for reports of harmful content targeting minors.  
22           e. Independent audit results of child safety measures.
- 23           (4) Submit such reports to the Department of Justice by January 31 of each year.
- 24           (5) Make such reports publicly accessible in a clear, conspicuous manner on the  
25           platform's website.
- 26       (d) Every social media platform shall do all of the following:
- 27           (1) Implement robust, age-appropriate parental control systems allowing parents  
28           or legal guardians to monitor and limit screen time, restrict access during  
29           specified hours, review connections and communications, and receive regular  
30           activity reports. These controls must be clearly accessible, understandable,  
31           and enabled by default for accounts of users under 18 years of age.
- 32           (2) Publish an annual Child Safety Transparency Report containing details on the  
33           following:  
34           a. Measures implemented to protect minors from harmful content.  
35           b. Statistics on content moderation actions related to child safety.  
36           c. Resources allocated to child protection efforts.  
37           d. Response metrics for reports of harmful content targeting minors.  
38           e. Independent audit results of child safety measures.
- 39           (3) Beginning January 1, 2027, submit these reports to the Department of Justice  
40           by January 31 of each year.
- 41           (4) Make such reports publicly accessible in a clear, conspicuous manner on the  
42           platform's website.

43 **"§ 66-507. Protection from artificial intelligence and deep fakes for exploitative purposes.**

44 No person shall knowingly do any of the following:

- 45           (1) Create, produce, or generate using artificial intelligence or digital  
46           manipulation technologies any image, video, or audio recording that depicts a  
47           person under 18 years of age in a sexually explicit manner, a violent or abusive  
48           context, or in any situation intended to cause reputational harm.
- 49           (2) Distribute, publish, share, or transfer such content through any medium or  
50           platform.

(3) Modify existing content depicting an actual minor through artificial intelligence or digital manipulation to create a substantially altered representation of that minor.

**"§ 66-508. Violations of this Article.**

(a) Any who person violates G.S. 66-505 or G.S. 66-506 shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

(b) Any person who violates G.S. 66-507 shall be guilty of a:

(1) Class H felony, if the violation involves creation or distribution of sexually explicit deep fake content depicting a minor.

(2) Class I felony, if the violation involves possession of such content with intent to distribute.

(c) Each item of prohibited content shall constitute a separate violation under this section.

(d) The penalties under this Article shall be in addition to any remedies available under federal law or other provisions of State law.

**"§ 66-509. Severability.**

If any provision of this Article is held to be invalid or unenforceable, the validity and enforceability of the remaining provisions shall remain valid and enforceable."

**SECTION 3.10.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2025, and applies to acts and omissions committed on or after that date.

**PART IV. FETAL & INFANT MORTALITY PREVENTION**

**CREATION OF FETAL AND INFANT MORTALITY REVIEW TEAM**

**SECTION 4.1.(a)** Article 5 of Chapter 130A of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new Part to read:

"Part 2A. Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team.

**"§ 130A-128.5. Scope.**

This part does not apply to the review of a fetal death that is the result of a voluntary or therapeutic termination of pregnancy.

**"§ 130A-128.6. Definitions.**

The following definitions apply in this Part:

(1) Fetal death. – Death prior to the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of human conception, regardless of the duration of pregnancy. Death is indicated by the fact that after expulsion or extraction the fetus does not breathe or show any other evidence of life such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord, or definite movement of voluntary muscles.

(2) Infant. – Any child under the age of 18 months.

(3) Team. – The Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team created by G.S. 130A-128.7.

**"§ 130A-128.7. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; creation; purpose; composition.**

(a) There is established a statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team within the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health. The purpose of the Team is to ensure that certain fetal and infant deaths occurring in the State are analyzed in a systematic way, with the specific goal of decreasing the incidence of preventable fetal and infant deaths.

(b) The Team shall consist of the following persons or their designees:

(1) The Chief Medical Examiner.

(2) The Director of the Division of Child and Family Well-Being.

(3) The Director of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services.

- 1           (4)    The Director of the Division of Public Health.  
2           (5)    The Director of the Division of Social Services.  
3           (6)    The State Registrar of Vital Records.  
4           (7)    The following seven members appointed by the Speaker of the House of  
5           Representatives:

- 6           a.     A representative of local law enforcement officers.  
7           b.     A representative of local fire departments.  
8           c.     A representative of local emergency medical services providers.  
9           d.     A representative of county departments of social services.  
10          e.     A representative of the North Carolina Medical Society.  
11          f.     A representative of the North Carolina Hospital Association.  
12          g.     A public member.

- 13          (8)    The following seven members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the  
14          Senate:

- 15          a.     A representative of the North Carolina College of Emergency  
16          Physicians.  
17          b.     A representative of the North Carolina Section of the American  
18          College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.  
19          c.     A representative of the North Carolina Affiliate of the American  
20          College of Nurse-Midwives.  
21          d.     A representative of the North Carolina Chapter of the Association of  
22          Women's Health.  
23          e.     A representative of Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses.  
24          f.     A representative of the North Carolina Neonatal Perinatal  
25          Collaborative.  
26          g.     A public member.

- 27          (9)    The following seven members appointed by the Governor:

- 28          a.     A representative of the North Carolina Midwives Alliance.  
29          b.     A representative of the North Carolina Academy of Nutrition and  
30          Dietetics.  
31          c.     Four members representing community-based organizations or  
32          nonprofit organizations that work directly with marginalized  
33          communities and communities of color on issues of fetal and infant  
34          mortality, at least one of whom shall be a doula and at least one of  
35          whom shall be a midwife.  
36          d.     One member of the public.

37          (c)    The Chief Medical Examiner and the Director of the Division of Public Health shall  
38          serve as cochairs of the Team and a majority of the Team members specified in subsection (b) of  
39          this section may invite additional individuals to serve on the Team.

40          (d)    Ex officio members shall serve terms coincident with their terms of office. After the  
41          initial staggering of terms, other members shall be appointed for a term of four years.

42          (e)    Appointments to fill vacancies, other than by expiration of a term, shall be for the  
43          unexpired terms. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments. All  
44          members except the eight community representatives may be reappointed.

45          "**§ 130A-128.8. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; powers and duties.**"

46          The Team has the following powers and duties:

- 47           (1)    To develop or revise as necessary operating procedures for fetal and infant  
48           death reviews conducted under this Part, including procedures for identifying  
49           appropriate cases to be reviewed and procedures for ensuring coordination  
50           among the State agencies and professionals involved in the review.

- 1           (2)    To improve the identification of, and data collection and recordkeeping related  
2           to, causes of fetal and infant deaths.
- 3           (3)    To recommend components of programs to increase awareness and prevention  
4           of and education about fetal and infant deaths.
- 5           (4)    To recommend training to improve the review of fetal and infant deaths.
- 6           (5)    To develop recommendations to assess the service systems and community  
7           resources that support and promote the health and well-being of women,  
8           infants, and families.
- 9           (6)    To provide technical support to any established local fetal and infant mortality  
10          review teams and local child fatality review teams.
- 11          (7)    To develop and recommend plans for implementing changes to existing State  
12          services, State programs, and organizations that serve families, children, and  
13          pregnant women.
- 14          (8)    To select a number of cases for in-depth review and interviews of parents,  
15          families, and medical personnel to develop a full picture of the causes of fetal  
16          or infant death, to evaluate gaps in services or access that may have played a  
17          part in the death, and to evaluate the supports available to families before and  
18          after the death.
- 19          (9)    To provide evidence-based policy recommendations to both reduce the rate of  
20          preventable fetal and infant deaths and to ensure that families receive  
21          necessary support pre-fetal or infant death and post-fetal or infant death.
- 22          (10)   In cases where the Team conducts in-depth interviews and reviews of specific  
23          cases, to ensure that the families involved in these cases have access to grief  
24          counseling and other necessary resources to be determined by the Team.

25    **§ 130A-128.9. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; case reviews;**  
26    **coordination with Local Teams.**

27          (a)    In conducting case reviews, the statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team  
28          shall coordinate with the Local Teams described in G.S. 7B-1406.5 to avoid duplicative work.

29          (b)    The Team shall review every reported fetal and infant death in the State, excluding  
30          those resulting from a voluntary or therapeutic termination of pregnancy.

31          (c)    The Team shall not initiate a fetal or infant death review until the conclusion of any  
32          law enforcement investigation or criminal prosecution.

33          (d)    Upon the request of the Chief Medical Examiner in his or her capacity as a cochair of  
34          the Team, made after the conclusion of any law enforcement investigation or prosecution, the  
35          Chief Medical Examiner or a designee may inspect and copy information and records regarding  
36          a fetal or infant death, including (i) any report of the circumstances of the death maintained by  
37          any State or local law enforcement agency or medical examiner and (ii) information or records  
38          about the mother and family maintained by any county department of social services or court.

39    **§ 130A-128.10. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; access to confidential**  
40    **records.**

41          (a)    Information, records, or reports maintained by any district attorney shall be made  
42          available for inspection and copying by the Chief Medical Examiner or the Chief Medical  
43          Examiner's designee.

44          (b)    Any presentence report prepared pursuant to G.S. 15A-1332 for any person convicted  
45          of a crime that led to the death of a fetus or infant shall be made available for inspection and  
46          copying by the Chief Medical Examiner or the Chief Medical Examiner's designee. In addition,  
47          the Chief Medical Examiner or the Chief Medical Examiner's designee may inspect and copy  
48          from any healthcare provider licensed to practice in North Carolina, on behalf of the Team, the  
49          following information:

50               (1)    Without obtaining consent, subject to any limitations on disclosure under  
51                applicable federal and State law, the health and mental health records of the

1 fetus or infant and mother and those prenatal medical records regarding the  
2 infant or fetus.

3 (2) Upon obtaining consent, from each adult regarding that adult's records. With  
4 the consent of the mother and other relevant adults, when deemed appropriate,  
5 designated members of the Team or Team designees may conduct interviews  
6 of any person deemed necessary to the investigative work of the Team. Any  
7 record of the interview or interviews shall be treated the same as any other  
8 record related to the work of the Team.

9 (c) The Commission for Public Health and the Attorney General shall adopt rules to  
10 implement this subsection.

11 **"§ 130A-128.11. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; confidentiality of**  
12 **information and records obtained or created by or on behalf of the Team.**

13 (a) All information and records obtained or created by or on behalf of the Team regarding  
14 a review are confidential and shall be excluded from the North Carolina Freedom of Information  
15 Act. All such information and records shall be used by the Team only in the exercise of its proper  
16 purpose and function and shall not be disclosed. In preparing information and records for review  
17 by the Team, the Department shall remove any individually identifiable information or  
18 information identifying a healthcare provider. Such information shall not be subject to subpoena,  
19 subpoena duces tecum, or discovery; be admissible in any civil or criminal proceeding; or be  
20 used as evidence in any disciplinary proceeding or regulatory or licensure action of the  
21 Department of Health Professions or any health regulatory board. If available from other sources,  
22 however, such information and records shall not be immune from subpoena, discovery, or  
23 introduction into evidence when obtained through such other sources solely because the  
24 information and records were presented to the Team during a fetal or infant death review.

25 (b) The findings of the Team may be disclosed or published in statistical or other form  
26 but shall not identify any individual.

27 (c) Upon conclusion of the fetal or infant death review, all information and records  
28 concerning the family shall be shredded or otherwise destroyed by the Office of the Chief  
29 Medical Examiner in order to ensure confidentiality.

30 (d) The portions of meetings in which individual fetal or infant deaths are discussed by  
31 the Team are not subject to Article 33C of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes. In addition, all  
32 Team members and other persons attending closed Team meetings, including any persons  
33 presenting information or records on specific fetal or infant deaths to the Team during closed  
34 meetings, shall execute a sworn statement to (i) honor the confidentiality of the information,  
35 records, discussions, and opinions disclosed during meetings at which the Team reviews a  
36 specific fetal or infant death and (ii) not use any such information, records, discussions, or  
37 opinions disclosed during meetings at which the Team reviews a specific fetal or infant death for  
38 any purpose other than the exercise of the proper purpose and function of the Team. Violations  
39 of this subsection are punishable as a Class 3 misdemeanor.

40 **"§ 130A-128.12. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; preservation of**  
41 **records related to fetal or infant death.**

42 Upon notification of a fetal or infant death, any State or local government agency maintaining  
43 records on the fetus or infant or the fetus or infant's family that are periodically purged shall  
44 retain the records for the longer of 12 months or until the Team has completed its review of the  
45 case.

46 **"§ 130A-128.13. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; triennial statistical**  
47 **data collection; considered a public record.**

48 (a) The Team shall compile triennial statistical data on fetal or infant death and make it  
49 available to the General Assembly, the Governor, and divisions of the Department of Health and  
50 Human Services. Prior to sharing any statistical data compiled pursuant to this section, the Team  
51 shall redact any personal identifying information in a manner consistent with the standards



1 specified for de-identification of health information under the HIPAA Privacy Rule, 45 C.F.R. §  
2 164.514, as amended. The Team shall include policy recommendations with the statistical data  
3 compilations to fulfill the purpose of the Team as specified in G.S. 130A-128.7.

4 (b) Any statistical compilations or policy recommendations prepared by the Team  
5 pursuant to this section shall be considered a public record as that term is defined in G.S. 132-1.  
6 **"§ 130A-128.14. Statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; immunity from civil**  
7 **liability.**

8 (a) Members of the statewide Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team, as well as their  
9 agents and employees, are immune from civil liability for any act or omission made in connection  
10 with their participation in a review conducted under this Part, unless that act or omission was the  
11 result of gross negligence or willful misconduct.

12 (b) Any organization, institution, or person that furnishes information, data, testimony,  
13 reports, or records to the Team as part of a review conducted under this Part is immune from civil  
14 liability for any act or omission in furnishing that information, unless the act or omission was the  
15 result of gross negligence or willful misconduct."

16 **SECTION 4.1.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2025.

17  
18 **STATEWIDE ADOPTION OF INFANT SAFE SLEEP PRACTICES**

19 **SECTION 4.2.** Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated from the General Fund  
20 to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, the sum of two  
21 hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) in nonrecurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027  
22 fiscal biennium to fund expansion of the Safe Sleep North Carolina Campaign administered by  
23 the University of North Carolina Collaborative for Maternal and Infant Health, with the goal of  
24 strengthening the adoption of infant safe sleep practices across the State that reduce the risk of  
25 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other infant sleep-related deaths.

26  
27 **PART V. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & LICENSING REFORMS**

28  
29 **FAST-TRACK LICENSING FOR EXPERIENCED CHILD CARE WORKERS &**  
30 **STATEWIDE EXPANSION OF THE BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES**  
31 **APPRENTICESHIP PILOT PROGRAM**

32 **SECTION 5.1.** Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated from the General Fund  
33 to the Department of Health and Human Services the sum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) in  
34 recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be used as follows:

- 35 (1) To establish and administer a fast-track licensing program for experienced  
36 child care workers that utilizes competency-based assessments for accelerated  
37 certification. To increase the number of licensed child care workers in the  
38 State, the Department shall offer this program free of charge to experienced  
39 child care workers regardless of whether they are residents of North Carolina.  
40 (2) To fund statewide expansion of the Building Bright Futures Apprenticeship  
41 Pilot Program, a pilot program designed to strengthen the early child care  
42 workforce through pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships. In expanding this  
43 pilot program statewide, the Department of Health and Human Services shall  
44 partner with the North Carolina Business Committee for Education, a  
45 nonprofit corporation operating out of the Governor's Office, to continue to  
46 work towards the primary purpose of creating supportive pathways for high  
47 school and postsecondary students to enter the early childhood workforce by  
48 allowing them to earn credentials, while also obtaining hands-on, work-based  
49 learning experiences, in the early childhood education field.

50  
51 **CHILD CARE WORKFORCE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**

1           **SECTION 5.2.** Article 3 of Chapter 115D of the General Statutes is amended by  
2 adding a new section to read:

3 **"§ 115D-40.7. Child Care Workforce Apprenticeship Program.**

4           The Community Colleges System Office shall establish and administer a program to provide  
5 stipends to any student attending a community college who is participating in an apprenticeship  
6 related to child care. The purpose of the program is to provide financial assistance to allow high  
7 school and college students to gain hands-on training in child care. The System Office shall  
8 develop an application for students to apply for stipends pursuant to this section. When selecting  
9 students to receive stipends, the System Office shall prioritize those applications demonstrating  
10 the most need. To the extent funds are made available for this purpose, the System Office shall  
11 provide tuition stipends of up to two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) to students for a  
12 single academic year. Students may receive a stipend pursuant to this section for up to two years  
13 but no more."

14  
15 **PART VI. PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

16           **SECTION 6.1.** To the greatest extent feasible, the Department of Health and Human  
17 Services and the Department of Public Instruction shall establish and utilize public-private  
18 partnerships to implement the programs and activities authorized by this act.  
19

20 **PART VII. OVERSIGHT AND REPORTING**

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22 **CHILD CARE INNOVATION TASK FORCE**

23           **SECTION 7.1.(a)** There is established the Child Care Innovation Task Force (Task  
24 Force) within the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development  
25 and Early Education, for budgetary purposes only. The purpose of the Task Force is to monitor  
26 the State's progress in implementing the programs, strategies, and initiatives authorized and  
27 funded by this act and to advise the General Assembly on strategies for improving the child care  
28 landscape in North Carolina. The Task Force shall be composed of the following 11 members:

- 29           (1) The Director of the Division of Child Development and Early Education or  
30 the Director's designee.  
31           (2) The Superintendent of Public Instruction or the Superintendent's designee.  
32           (3) Three members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, one of  
33 whom shall be a representative of the NC Licensed Child Care Association;  
34 one of whom shall be a representative of Early Years, formerly Child Care  
35 Services Association; and one of whom shall be an expert in the child care  
36 industry.  
37           (4) Three members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives,  
38 one of whom shall be a representative of the North Carolina Child Care  
39 Resource and Referral Council; one of whom shall be a representative of Child  
40 Care for NC; and one of whom shall be an expert in the child care industry.  
41           (5) Three public members, one each appointed by the President Pro Tempore of  
42 the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Governor.

43           In making appointments or designating representatives, appointing authorities shall  
44 use best efforts to select members or representatives with sufficient knowledge and experience  
45 to effectively contribute to the issues examined by the Task Force. All members of the Task  
46 Force are voting members. Any vacancies that occur for any membership positions that are not  
47 held as a function of office shall be filled by the appointing authority upon vacancy. The Director  
48 of the Division of Child Development and Early Education, or the Director's designee, shall serve  
49 as the chair of the Task Force.

50           **SECTION 7.1.(b)** The Task Force established under subsection (a) of this section  
51 has the following powers and duties:

- 1           (1) To examine the State's progress in implementing the programs, strategies, and  
2 initiatives authorized and funded by this act.
- 3           (2) To study and make recommendations for reducing child care deserts,  
4 eliminating the child care workforce shortage, increasing the number of child  
5 care facilities and child care workers, and improving the quality of child care.
- 6           (3) To review innovative child care strategies in other states and make  
7 recommendations about which strategies North Carolina should consider  
8 implementing.
- 9           (4) To collect and summarize data on employer-sponsored child care and the rates  
10 of participation by employees.
- 11           (5) To perform any other studies, evaluations, or determinations the Task Force  
12 considers necessary in improving the child care landscape in North Carolina.

13           **SECTION 7.1.(c)** Annually by April 1, beginning April 1, 2027, the Task Force shall  
14 submit a written report of its activities, findings, and recommendations to the Joint Legislative  
15 Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, the Joint Legislative Education Oversight  
16 Committee, and the Fiscal Research Division.

17  
18 **PART VIII. SEVERABILITY**

19           **SECTION 8.1.** If any section or provision of this act is declared unconstitutional or  
20 invalid by the courts, it does not affect the validity of this act as a whole or any part other than  
21 the part declared to be unconstitutional or invalid.

22  
23 **PART IX. EFFECTIVE DATE**

24           **SECTION 9.1.** Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes  
25 law.