

Part 6. Involuntary Commitment – General Provisions.

§ 122C-251. Custody and transportation.

(a) Except as provided in subsections (c), (f), and (g) [of this section], transportation of a respondent within a county under the involuntary commitment proceedings of this Article, including admission and discharge, shall be provided by the city or county. The city has the duty to provide transportation of a respondent who is a resident of the city or who is physically taken into custody in the city limits. The county has the duty to provide transportation for a respondent who resides in the county outside city limits or who is physically taken into custody outside of city limits. However, cities and counties may contract with each other to provide transportation.

(b) Except as provided in subsections (c), (f), and (g) [of this section] or in G.S. 122C-408(b), transportation between counties under the involuntary commitment proceedings of this Article for a first examination as described in G.S. 122C-263(a) and G.S. 122C-283(a) and for admission to a 24-hour facility shall be provided by the county where the respondent is taken into custody. Transportation between counties under the involuntary commitment proceedings of this Article for respondents held in 24-hour facilities who have requested a change of venue for the district court hearing shall be provided by the county where the petition for involuntary commitment was initiated. Transportation between counties under the involuntary commitment proceedings of this Article for discharge of a respondent from a 24-hour facility shall be provided by the county of residence of the respondent. However, a respondent being discharged from a facility may use his own transportation at his own expense.

(c) Transportation of a respondent may be (i) by city- or county-owned vehicles, (ii) by private vehicle by contract with the city or county, or (iii) as provided in an agreement developed and adopted under subsection (g) of this section and G.S. 122C-202.2. To the extent feasible, law enforcement officers transporting respondents shall dress in plain clothes and shall travel in unmarked vehicles. Further, law enforcement officers, to the extent possible, shall advise respondents when taking them into custody that they are not under arrest and have not committed a crime, but are being taken into custody and transported to receive treatment and for their own safety and that of others.

(d) To the extent feasible, in providing transportation of a respondent, a city or county shall provide a driver or attendant who is the same sex as the respondent, unless the law enforcement officer allows a family member of the respondent to accompany the respondent in lieu of an attendant of the same sex as the respondent.

(e) In taking custody and providing transportation as required by this section, the law enforcement officer may use reasonable force to restrain the respondent if it appears necessary to protect the law enforcement officer, the respondent, or others. Any use of restraints shall be as reasonably determined by the officer to be necessary under the circumstances for the safety of the respondent, the law enforcement officer, and other persons. Every effort to avoid restraint of a child under the age of 10 shall be made by the transporting officer unless the child's behavior or other circumstances dictate that restraint is necessary. The law enforcement officer shall respond to all inquiries from the facility concerning the respondent's behavior and the use of any restraints related to the custody and transportation of the respondent, except in circumstances where providing that information is confidential or would otherwise compromise a law enforcement investigation. No law enforcement officer or other person designated or required to provide custody or transport of a client under G.S. 122C-251 may be held criminally or civilly liable for assault, false imprisonment, or other torts or crimes on account of reasonable measures taken under the authority of this Article.

(f) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a), (b), and (c) of this section, a clerk, a magistrate, or a district court judge, where applicable, may authorize either a health care provider of the respondent or the family or immediate friends of the respondent, if they so

request, to transport the respondent in accordance with the procedures of this Article. This authorization shall only be granted in cases where the danger to the public, the health care provider of the respondent, the family or friends of the respondent, or the respondent himself or herself is not substantial. The health care provider of the respondent or the family or immediate friends of the respondent shall bear the costs of providing this transportation.

(g) The governing body of a city or county shall adopt a plan known as an "involuntary commitment transportation agreement" or "transportation agreement" for the custody and transportation of respondents in involuntary commitment proceedings under this Article as follows:

- (1) Law enforcement and other affected agencies, including local acute care hospitals and other mental health providers, shall participate in developing the transportation agreement. The area authority may participate in developing the transportation agreement.
- (2) The transportation agreement may designate law enforcement officers, volunteers, or other public or private personnel who have agreed pursuant to subsection (g) of this section to provide all or parts of the custody and transportation required by involuntary commitment proceedings. Persons so designated or otherwise required to provide all or parts of the custody and transportation required by involuntary commitment proceedings shall be trained as set forth in G.S. 122C-202.2(a)(3), and the plan shall assure adequate safety and protections for both the public and the respondent. Any person or agency designated or required to provide all or parts of the custody and transportation required by involuntary commitment proceedings shall follow the procedures in this Article. References in this Article to a law enforcement officer apply to any person or entity designated to provide custody or transportation. The transportation agreement may provide that private personnel or agencies may contract for transportation services to transport respondents under involuntary commitment from one entity to another.
- (3) A person shall not be designated under subsection (g) of this section without that person's written consent and the written consent of his or her employer, if applicable. An agency, corporation, or entity shall not be designated without the written consent of that agency, corporation, or entity. Any person, agency, corporation, or other entity shall be designated to provide only the services which the person, agency, corporation, or other entity has previously consented in writing to provide and shall be permitted to withdraw from or discontinue providing services, in whole or in part, upon written notice to the designating governing body. The transportation agreement shall be submitted to the magistrates in the city or county's judicial district, to the county clerks of court, to the LME/MCO that serves the city or county, and to the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services on or before January 1, 2019. If the city or county modifies the transportation agreement, it will submit the modified agreement to their magistrates in their judicial district, county clerks of court, the LME/MCO that serves the city or county, and the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services at least 10 days prior to the effective date of the new plan.
- (4) Counties and cities shall retain and be required to perform the responsibilities set forth in this Article, except as set forth in a plan developed, agreed upon, and adopted in compliance with this subsection.

(h) The cost and expenses of custody and transportation of a respondent as required by the involuntary commitment procedures of this Article, to the extent they are not reimbursed by a third-party insurer, are the responsibility of the county of residence of the respondent. The State (when providing transportation under G.S. 122C-408(b)), a city, or a county is entitled to recover the reasonable cost of transportation from the county of residence of the respondent. The county of residence of the respondent shall reimburse the State, another county, or a city the reasonable transportation costs incurred as authorized by this subsection. The county of residence of the respondent is entitled to recover the reasonable cost of transportation it has paid to the State, a city, or a county. Provided that the county of residence provides the respondent or other individual liable for the respondent's support a reasonable notice and opportunity to object to the reimbursement, the county of residence of the respondent may recover that cost from:

- (1) The respondent, if the respondent is not indigent;
- (2) Any person or entity that is legally liable for the resident's support and maintenance provided there is sufficient property to pay the cost;
- (3) Any person or entity that is contractually responsible for the cost; or
- (4) Any person or entity that otherwise is liable under federal, State, or local law for the cost. (1899, c. 1, s. 32; Rev., s. 4555; 1919, c. 326, s. 4; C.S., ss. 6201, 6202; 1945, c. 952, ss. 29, 30; 1953, c. 256, s. 6; 1961, c. 186; 1963, c. 1184, s. 1; 1969, c. 982; 1973, c. 1408, s. 1; 1979, c. 915, ss. 21, 22; 1983, c. 138, ss. 1, 2; 1985, c. 589, s. 2; 1987, c. 268; 1995 (Reg. Sess., 1996), c. 739, s. 4; 1999-201, s. 1; 1999-456, s. 36; 2015-176, s. 2.5(a); 2018-33, s. 19; 2019-240, s. 26(f); 2021-138, s. 6(a); 2023-65, s. 5.2(b).)