

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 1999

SENATE BILL 995
RATIFIED BILL

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TESTIMONIAL PRIVILEGE FOR POLICE PEER
SUPPORT GROUP COUNSELORS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

Section 1. Article 7 of Chapter 8 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 8-53.10. Peer support group counselors.

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

- (1) Client law enforcement employee. -- Any law enforcement employee or a member of his or her immediate family who is in need of and receives peer counseling services offered by the officer's employing law enforcement agency.
- (2) Immediate family. -- A spouse, child, stepchild, parent, or stepparent.
- (3) Peer counselor. -- Any law enforcement officer or civilian employee of a law enforcement agency who:
 - a. Has received training to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to client law enforcement employees and their immediate families; and
 - b. Was designated by the sheriff, police chief, or other head of a law enforcement agency to counsel a client law enforcement employee.
- (4) Privileged communication. -- Any communication made by a client law enforcement employee or a member of the client law enforcement employee's immediate family to a peer counselor while receiving counseling.

(b) A peer counselor shall not disclose any privileged communication that was necessary to enable the counselor to render counseling services unless one of the following apply:

- (1) The disclosure is authorized by the client or, if the client is deceased, the disclosure is authorized by the client's executor, administrator, or in the case of unadministrated estates, the client's next of kin.
- (2) The disclosure is necessary to the proper administration of justice and, subject to G.S. 8-53.6, is compelled by a resident or presiding judge. If the case is in district court the judge shall be a district court judge, and if the case is in superior court the judge shall be a superior court judge.

(c) The privilege established by this section shall not apply:

- (1) If the peer counselor was an initial responding officer, a witness, or a party to the incident that prompted the delivery of peer counseling services.
- (2) To communications made while the peer counselor was not acting in his or her official capacity as a peer counselor.
- (3) To communications related to a violation of criminal law. This subdivision does not require the disclosure of otherwise privileged communications related to an officer's use of force.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of this section, the peer counselor privilege shall not be grounds for failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate county department of social services, or for failure to report a disabled adult suspected to be in need of protective services to the appropriate county department of social services. Notwithstanding the provisions of this section, the peer counselor privilege shall not be grounds for excluding evidence regarding the abuse or neglect of a child, or an illness of or injuries to a child, or the cause thereof, or for excluding evidence regarding the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a disabled adult, or an illness of or injuries to a disabled adult, or the cause thereof, in any judicial proceeding related to a report pursuant to the Child Abuse Reporting Law, Article 3 of Chapter 7B, or to the Protection of the Abused, Neglected, or Exploited Disabled Adult Act, Article 6 of Chapter 108A of the General Statutes."

Section 2. This act becomes effective December 1, 1999, and applies to all actions and proceedings pending in the courts of this State on or after that date.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 19th day of July, 1999.

 Dennis A. Wicker
 President of the Senate

 James B. Black
 Speaker of the House of Representatives

 James B. Hunt, Jr.
 Governor

Approved _____ .m. this _____ day of _____ , 19