

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2021**

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**HOUSE BILL 212  
Committee Substitute Favorable 3/24/21**

Short Title: Social Services Reform.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 4, 2021

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT VARIOUS PROVISIONS RELATED TO SOCIAL SERVICES REFORM AND TO REPEAL CERTAIN CHANGES TO THE ADOPTION LAWS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.(a)** In accordance with the plan submitted by the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) in its report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services as required by S.L. 2017-41 (Rylan's Law), the Department of Health and Human Services (Department) shall establish seven regions for regional supervision of child welfare and social services and begin providing oversight and support within those regions through home-based staff and the central office team by March 1, 2022. To that end, the Department shall move forward, pursuant to existing authority, with repurposing and redeploying (i) positions identified in the report to support regionalization and (ii) all managerial staff needed to support regionalization in the central office. The Department shall pursue procurement of physical offices within each of the seven regions beginning in March 2023 and shall prioritize staffing to improve the child welfare system. The Department shall move towards full implementation of a regional model, with offices, by March 1, 2024.

**SECTION 1.(b)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, the sum of nine hundred sixteen thousand one hundred seventy-one dollars (\$916,171) recurring for each year of the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium to support 11 new staff positions to improve regional supervision and support of child welfare services pursuant to the plan as described under subsection (a) of this section.

**SECTION 1.(c)** This section becomes effective July 1, 2021.

**SECTION 2.(a)** G.S. 108A-9 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 108A-9. Duties and responsibilities.**

The county board of social services shall have the following duties and responsibilities:

- (1) To select the county director of social services according to the merit system rules of the North Carolina Human Resources ~~Commission;~~Commission.
- (2) To advise county and municipal authorities in developing policies and plans to improve the social conditions of the ~~community;~~community.
- (3) To consult with the director of social services about problems relating to his office, and to assist him in planning budgets for the county department of social ~~services;~~services.
- (4) To transmit or present the budgets of the county department of social services for public assistance, social services, and administration to the board of county ~~commissioners;~~commissioners.



1           (4a) To attend education and training sessions provided for new board members  
2           during the first year they serve on the board.

3           ...."

4           **SECTION 2.(b)** The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social  
5 Services, shall collaborate with key stakeholders, including the North Carolina Association of  
6 County Boards of Social Services, Association of North Carolina County Social Services  
7 Directors, North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, and the University of North  
8 Carolina School of Government, to create formal education and training sessions for new county  
9 boards of social services members in accordance with G.S. 108A-9(4a), as provided in subsection  
10 (a) of this section. The education and training sessions shall include a segment on the potential  
11 liabilities of the county board of social services. The education and training sessions shall be  
12 available statewide by March 1, 2022.

13           **SECTION 2.(c)** Subsection (b) of this section is effective when it becomes law.  
14 Subsection (a) of this section becomes effective October 1, 2021, and by October 1, 2023, all  
15 current county board of social services members must have participated in the education and  
16 training sessions provided in G.S. 108A-9(4a).

17           **SECTION 3.** The Administrative Office of the Courts shall conduct a feasibility and  
18 cost study of a proposed child support tribunal, with dedicated court officers to hear child support  
19 matters, using quasi-judicial procedures. The study shall include, at a minimum, strategies to  
20 address funding, staffing, and a plan for how the proposed changes will be implemented. The  
21 Administrative Office of the Courts shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations to  
22 the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by March 1, 2022.

23           **SECTION 4.(a)** Part 2B of Article 1 of Chapter 108A of the General Statutes is  
24 amended by adding a new section to read:

25 **"§ 108A-15.16. Conflicts of interest.**

26 When conflicts of interest arise in the provision of social services provided by county  
27 departments of social services, county departments of social services shall work expeditiously to  
28 resolve those conflicts consistent with applicable law and any policies and procedures established  
29 by the Department of Health and Human Services. Policies and procedures shall address county  
30 financial and practice responsibilities associated with conflicts of interest. Upon identifying a  
31 conflict of interest, the county shall notify the appropriate authority within the Department of  
32 Health and Human Services of the conflict. The Department of Health and Human Services shall  
33 have authority to make final decisions regarding conflicts of interest assignments when disputes  
34 arise, with regional staff having initial authority when a dispute arises between county  
35 departments of social services and central office staff having initial authority when disputes arise  
36 between regions. The Social Services Commission shall adopt rules regarding conflicts of interest  
37 management, including establishing reasonable and specific time lines for resolving conflicts of  
38 interest. For purposes of this section, a "conflict of interest" occurs when a county department of  
39 social services is not able to manage the adverse interests of two individuals that the department  
40 of social services owes a duty to serve, or because of a preexisting relationship between an  
41 individual and a county that results in a county department of social services' inability to  
42 objectively fulfill its statutory responsibilities, or when the provision of social services and duty  
43 owed by a county department of social services conflicts with services and the duty owed by  
44 another county department of social services."

45           **SECTION 4.(b)** The Social Services Commission shall report to the Joint Legislative  
46 Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services upon adopting rules pursuant to  
47 G.S. 108A-15.16, as enacted in subsection (a) of this section.

48           **SECTION 5.** Part I of S.L. 2017-41 reads as rewritten:

49           **"SECTION 1.1.** Regional Supervision of and Collaboration by Local Social Services  
50 Programs. –

51           ...

- 1 (3) The Department shall submit the plan to the Joint Legislative Oversight  
2 Committee on Health and Human Services by November 15, 2018. The plan  
3 shall provide for the system of regional supervision to be operational no later  
4 than March 1, ~~2020.~~ 2024. The Department shall not implement the plan  
5 without an act by the General Assembly.

6 **"SECTION 1.2.(a)** Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working  
7 Group. – The School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (SOG)  
8 shall ~~convene a~~ continue the work of the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration  
9 Working Group (Working Group) to make recommendations to the Department regarding the  
10 regional supervision and collaboration plan. The Working Group shall consist of the currently  
11 constituted members as of December 1, 2018.

12 **"SECTION 1.2.(b)** Composition. – The Working Group shall consist of the following  
13 members:

- 14 (1) Three members ~~of the Senate~~ appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the  
15 Senate, one of whom shall be designated as a cochair.  
16 (2) Three members ~~of the House of Representatives~~ appointed by the Speaker of  
17 the House of Representatives, one of whom shall be designated as a cochair.

18 ...

19 **"SECTION 1.2.(b1)** Vacancy. – A vacancy on the Working Group created by death,  
20 resignation, or otherwise shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

21 ...

22 **"SECTION 1.2.(d)** Duties. – The Working Group shall continue to develop  
23 recommendations for the regional supervision and collaboration plan required by Section 1.1 of  
24 this act. The Working Group shall ~~divide its work into two stages, the first~~ continue to (i) address  
25 regional supervision and ~~the second to (ii)~~ address interagency collaboration and regionalization.

- 26 (1) Stage One. – The Working Group shall ~~convene its first meeting~~ no later than  
27 ~~October 6, 2017. During the first stage, the Working Group shall develop~~  
28 October 8, 2021, and continue developing recommendations regarding:  
29 a. The size, number, and location of the regions. Recommendations shall  
30 take into consideration (i) the need for regions to maintain direct, local  
31 connections with the jurisdictions they serve; (ii) alignment with other  
32 regional organizations that intersect with the work of social services,  
33 as appropriate; and (iii) awareness of the cultural differences and  
34 similarities between regions.  
35 b. The allocation of responsibility between the central, regional, and local  
36 officials in supervising and administering the social services programs  
37 and services.  
38 c. Methods for holding the regional offices accountable for performance  
39 and responsiveness.  
40 d. Requirements for the regional offices to share information about local  
41 departmental performance with the relevant board or boards of county  
42 commissioners, county or regional board of social services, or  
43 consolidated human services board.  
44 e. Options for authorizing the board of county commissioners to  
45 intervene in urgent situations to assume direct control of the  
46 department of social services at the local level prior to the State  
47 assuming control of service delivery pursuant to G.S. 108A-74.  
48 f. Any other issues related to regional supervision identified by the  
49 cochairs.  
50 (2) Stage Two. – ~~During the second stage, the~~ The Working Group shall:

- 1 a. Develop recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory  
2 changes necessary to improve collaboration between counties in the  
3 administration of social services programs and services.  
4 Recommendations shall address, at a minimum, information sharing,  
5 conflicts of interest, and intercounty movement of people enrolled in  
6 programs or receiving social services.
- 7 b. Develop a vision for transitioning the State from a  
8 county-administered system to a regionally administered system. The  
9 vision shall identify general benefits and challenges associated with  
10 making such a transition.
- 11 (3) Stage Three. – After completing the work in Stages One and Two, the  
12 Working Group shall:
- 13 a. Review the recommendations from the Center for the Support of  
14 Families and the Department. After reviewing both reports, the  
15 Working Group shall revise the Stage One recommendations  
16 regarding regional supervision.
- 17 b. Provide more detailed recommendations regarding the following:
- 18 1. The role of local elected officials and social services governing  
19 boards in social services oversight.
- 20 2. Legal representation of local social services agencies.
- 21 3. Managing conflicts of interest.
- 22 4. Determining residency for social services programs and  
23 services.
- 24 5. Transferring and changing venue in adult guardianship cases.
- 25 6. Notice requirements for adult guardianship cases.
- 26 7. Confidentiality of social services records, as it relates to  
27 improving interagency collaboration and service delivery.
- 28 c. Conduct a study regarding appointments of and funding for publicly  
29 funded guardians. The study must include all of the following:
- 30 1. A description of the current types of appointments of publicly  
31 funded guardians.
- 32 2. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the various types of  
33 publicly funded guardians.
- 34 3. Recommendations for management of publicly funded  
35 guardians.
- 36 **"SECTION 1.2.(e) Reports. –**
- 37 (1) Stage One. – The Working Group shall submit a report to the Joint Legislative  
38 Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services (Committee) and the  
39 Department at the conclusion of Stage One, which shall be no later than April  
40 15, 2018. After receiving the Stage One report, the Committee may terminate  
41 the Working Group if it concludes that the Working Group is not making  
42 sufficient progress.
- 43 (2) Stage Two. – The Working Group shall submit a report to the Committee and  
44 the Department at the conclusion of Stage Two, which shall be no later than  
45 February 1, 2019.
- 46 (3) Stage Three. – The Working Group shall submit a preliminary report to the  
47 Committee no later than October 15, 2022, providing an update on its  
48 continued work. After receiving the preliminary report, the Committee may  
49 terminate the Working Group if it concludes the Working Group is not making  
50 sufficient progress. The Working Group shall submit a final report of its

1                                   recommendations to the Committee no later than February 1, 2023, and shall  
2                                   terminate upon the final report.  
3                    ...."  
4                    **SECTION 6.** The Department of Health and Human Services shall conduct a  
5 feasibility study and make recommendations on transferring adult guardianship cases from the  
6 Department to counties. Findings and recommendations from the feasibility study, including  
7 what support counties may need, including monetary support, for assuming this task, shall be  
8 made to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by March 1,  
9 2022.  
10                   **SECTION 7.** G.S. 7B-3807 and G.S. 7B-3808 are repealed.  
11                   **SECTION 8.** Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes  
12 law.