

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2001**

**SESSION LAW 2002-64
HOUSE BILL 1583**

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE LEGAL EFFECT OF THE USE OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY IN CRIMINAL PROCESS AND PROCEDURE, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA COURTS COMMISSION.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Article 1 of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 15A-101.1. Electronic technology in criminal process and procedure.

As used in this Chapter, in Chapter 7A of the General Statutes, in Chapter 15 of the General Statutes, and in all other provisions of the General Statutes that deal with criminal process or procedure:

- (1) "Copy" means all identical versions of a document created or existing in paper form, including the original and all other identical versions of the document in paper form.
- (2) "Document" means any pleading, criminal process, subpoena, complaint, motion, application, notice, affidavit, commission, waiver, consent, dismissal, order, judgment, or other writing intended in a criminal or contempt proceeding to authorize or require an action, to record a decision or to communicate or record information. The term does not include search warrants. A document may be created and exist in paper form or in electronic form or in both forms. Each document shall contain the legible, printed name of the person who signed the document.
- (3) "Electronic" means relating to technology having electrical, digital, magnetic, wireless, optical, electromagnetic, Internet, or similar capabilities.
- (4) "Electronic Repository" means an automated electronic repository for criminal process created and maintained pursuant to G.S. 15A-301.1.
- (5) "Electronic signature" means any electronic method of signing a document that meets each of the following requirements:
 - a. Identifies and authenticates a particular person as the signer of the document, is unique to the person using it, is capable of certification, and is under the sole control of the person using it.
 - b. Is attached to or logically associated with the document in such a manner that if the document is altered in any way without authorization of the signer, the signature is invalidated.
 - c. Indicates that person's intent to issue, enter or otherwise authenticate the document.
- (6) "Entered" means signed and filed in the office of the clerk of superior court of the county in which the document is to be entered. A document may be entered in either paper form or electronic form.
- (7) "Filing" or "filed" means:
 - a. When the document is in paper form, delivering the original document to the office where the document is to be filed. Filing

- is complete when the original document is received in the office where the document is to be filed.
- b. When the document is in electronic form, creating and saving the document, or transmitting it, in such a way that it is unalterably retained in the electronic records of the office where the document is to be filed. A document is "unalterably retained" in an electronic record when it may not be edited or otherwise altered except by a person with authorization to do so. Filing is complete when the document has first been unalterably retained in the electronic records of the office where the document is to be filed.
- (8) "Issued" applies to documents in either paper form or electronic form. A document that is first created in paper form is issued when it is signed. A document that is first created in electronic form is issued when it is signed, filed in the office of the clerk of superior court of the county for which it is to be issued, and retained in the Electronic Repository.
- (9) "Original" means:
- a. A document first created and existing only in paper form, bearing the original signature of the person who signed it. The term also includes each copy in paper form that is printed through the facsimile transmission of the copy bearing the original signature of the person who signed it.
- b. A document existing in electronic form, including the electronic form of the document and any copy that is printed from the electronic form.
- (10) "Signature" means any symbol, including, but not limited to, the name of an individual, which is executed by that individual, personally or through an authorized agent, with the intent to authenticate or to effect the issuance or entry of a document. The term includes an electronic signature. A document may be signed by the use of any manual, mechanical or electronic means that causes the individual's signature to appear in or on the document. Any party challenging the validity of a signature shall have the burden of pleading, producing evidence, and proving the following:
- a. The signature was not the act of the person whose signature it appears to be.
- b. If the signature is an electronic signature, the requirements of subdivision (5) of this section have not been met."

SECTION 2. Article 17 of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 15A-301.1. Electronic Repository.

(a) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall create and maintain, in cooperation with State and local law enforcement agencies, an automated electronic repository for criminal process (hereinafter referred to as the Electronic Repository), which shall comprise a secure system of electronic data entry, storage, and retrieval that provides for creating, signing, issuing, entering, filing, and retaining criminal process in electronic form, and that provides for the following with regard to criminal process in electronic form:

- (1) Tracking criminal process.
- (2) Accessing criminal process through remote electronic means by all authorized judicial officials and employees and all authorized law enforcement officers and agencies that have compatible electronic access capacity.

- (3) Printing any criminal process in paper form by any authorized judicial official or employee or any authorized law enforcement officer or agency.

The Administrative Office of the Courts shall assure that all electronic signatures effected through use of the system meet the requirements of G.S. 15A-101.1(5).

(b) Any criminal process may be created, signed, and issued in electronic form, filed electronically in the office of a clerk of superior court, and retained in electronic form in the Electronic Repository.

(c) Any process that was first created, signed, and issued in paper form may subsequently be filed in electronic form and entered in the Electronic Repository by the judicial official who issued the process or by any person authorized to enter it on behalf of the judicial official. All copies of the process in paper form are then subject to the provisions of subsections (i) and (k) of this section.

(d) Any criminal process in the Electronic Repository shall be part of the official records of the clerk of superior court of the county for which it was issued and shall be maintained in the office of that clerk as required by G.S. 15A-301(a).

(e) Any criminal process in the Electronic Repository may, at any time and at any place in this State, be printed in paper form and delivered to a law enforcement agency or officer by any judicial official, law enforcement officer, or other authorized person.

(f) When printed in paper form pursuant to subsection (e) of this section, any copy of a criminal process in the Electronic Repository confers the same authority and has the same force and effect for all other purposes as the original of a criminal process that was created and exists only in paper form.

(g) Service of any criminal process in the Electronic Repository may be effected by delivering to the person to be served a copy of the process that was printed in paper form pursuant to subsection (e) of this section.

(h) The tracking information specified in subsection (i) of this section shall promptly be entered in the Electronic Repository when one or both of the following occurs:

- (1) A process is first created, signed, and issued in paper form and subsequently entered in electronic form in the Electronic Repository as provided in subsection (c) of this section.
- (2) A copy of a process in the Electronic Repository is printed in paper form pursuant to subsection (e) of this section.

(i) The following tracking information shall be entered in the Electronic Repository in accordance with subsections (c) and (h) of this section:

- (1) The date and time when the process was printed in paper form.
- (2) The name of the law enforcement agency by or for which the process was printed in paper form.
- (3) If available, the name and identification number of the law enforcement officer to whom any copy of the process was delivered.

(j) The service requirements set forth in subsection (k) of this section shall apply to:

- (1) Each copy of a criminal process that is first created in paper form and subsequently entered into the Electronic Repository as provided in subsection (c) of this section.
- (2) Each copy of a criminal process in the Electronic Repository that is printed in paper form pursuant to subsection (e) of this section.

(k) Service Requirements for Process Entered in the Electronic Repository. – The copy of the process shall be served not later than 24 hours after it has been printed. The date, time, and place of service shall promptly be recorded in the Electronic Repository and shall be part of the official records of the court. If the process is not served within 24 hours, that fact shall promptly be recorded in the Electronic Repository and all copies of the process in paper form shall be destroyed. The process may again be

printed in paper form at later times and at the same or other places. Subsection (f) of this section applies to each successively printed copy of the process. When service of the warrant is no longer being actively pursued, that fact shall be promptly recorded in the Electronic Repository.

(l) A law enforcement officer or agency that does not have compatible remote access to the Electronic Repository shall promptly communicate, by any reasonable means, the information required by subsection (k) of this section to the clerk of superior court of the county in which the process was issued or to any other person authorized to enter information into the Electronic Repository, and the information shall promptly be entered in the Electronic Repository.

(m) Failure to enter any information as required by subsection (i) or (k) of this section does not invalidate the process, nor does it invalidate service or execution made after the period specified in subsection (k) of this section.

(n) A warrant created and existing only in paper form is returned within the meaning of G.S. 132-1.4(k) when it is returned as provided in G.S. 15A-301(d). A warrant that exists only in electronic form in the Electronic Repository is returned within the meaning of G.S. 132-1.4(k), when it has been served or when service of the warrant is no longer being actively pursued, as either fact is entered in the Electronic Repository pursuant to subsection (k) of this section."

SECTION 3. G.S. 15A-301 reads as rewritten:

"§ 15A-301. Criminal process generally.

(a) Formal Requirements. –

(1) A record of each criminal process issued in the trial division of the General Court of Justice must be maintained in the office of the ~~clerk~~ clerk in either paper form or in electronic form in the Electronic Repository as provided in G.S. 15A-301.1.

(2) Criminal process, other than a citation, must be signed and dated by the justice, judge, magistrate, or clerk who issues it. The citation must be signed and dated by the law-enforcement officer who issues it.

(b) To Whom Directed. – Warrants for arrest and orders for arrest must be directed to a particular officer, a class of officers, or a combination thereof, having authority and territorial jurisdiction to execute the process. A criminal summons must be directed to the person summoned to appear and must be delivered to and may be served by any law-enforcement officer having authority and territorial jurisdiction to make an arrest for the offense charged, except that in those instances where the defendant is called into a law-enforcement agency to receive a summons, any employee so designated by the agency's chief executive officer may serve a criminal summons at the agency's office. The citation must be directed to the person cited to appear.

(c) Service. –

(1) A law-enforcement officer or other employee designated as provided in subsection (b) receiving ~~criminal process~~ a criminal process that was first created and exists only in paper form must note thereon the date and time of its receipt. A law enforcement officer receiving a copy of a criminal process that was printed in paper form as provided in G.S. 15A-301.1 shall cause the date of receipt to be recorded as provided in that section. Upon execution or service, a copy of the process must be delivered to the person arrested or served.

(2) A corporation may be served with criminal summons as provided in G.S. 15A-773.

(d) Return. –

(1) The officer or other employee designated as provided in subsection (b) who serves or executes a criminal process that was first created and exists only in paper form must enter the date and time of the service or execution on the process and return it to the clerk of court in the county in which issued. The officer or other employee designated as

provided in subsection (b) of this section who serves or executes a copy of a criminal process that was printed in paper form as provided in G.S. 15A-301.1 shall promptly cause the date of the service or execution to be recorded as provided in that section.

(2) If criminal process that was created and exists only in paper form is not served or executed within a number of days indicated below, it must be returned to the clerk of court in the county in which it was issued, with a reason for the failure of service or execution noted thereon.

a. Warrant for arrest – 180 days.

b. Order for arrest – 180 days.

c. Criminal summons – 90 days or the date the defendant is directed to appear, whichever is earlier.

(3) Failure to return the process to the clerk as required by subdivision (2) of this subsection does not invalidate the process, nor does it invalidate service or execution made after the period specified in subdivision (2).

(4) The clerk to which return of a criminal process that was created and exists only in paper form is made may redeliver the process to a law-enforcement officer or other employee designated as provided in subsection (b) for further attempts at service. If the process is a criminal summons, he may reissue it only upon endorsement of a new designated time and date of appearance.

(e) Copies to Be Made by Clerk. –

(1) The clerk may make a certified copy of any criminal process that was created and exists only in paper form filed in his office pursuant to subsection (a) when the original process has been lost or when the process has been returned pursuant to subdivision (d)(2). The copy may be executed as effectively as the original process whether or not the original has been redelivered as provided in G.S. 15A-301(d)(4).

(2) When criminal process is returned to the clerk pursuant to subdivision (d)(1) and it appears that the appropriate venue is in another county, the clerk must make and retain a certified copy of the process and transmit the original process to the clerk in the appropriate county.

(3) Upon request of a defendant, the clerk must make and furnish to him without charge one copy of every criminal process filed against him.

(4) Nothing in this section prevents the making and retention of uncertified copies of process for information purposes under G.S. 15A-401(a)(2) or for any other lawful purpose.

(f) Protection of Process Server. – An officer or other employee designated as provided in subsection (b), and serving process as provided in subsection (b), receiving under this section or under G.S. 15A-301.1 criminal process which is complete and regular on its face may serve the process in accordance with its terms and need not inquire into its regularity or continued validity, nor does he incur criminal or civil liability for its due service.

(g) Recall of Process – Authority. – A criminal process that has not been served on the defendant, other than a citation, shall be recalled by a judicial official or by a person authorized to act on behalf of a judicial official as follows:

(1) A warrant or criminal summons shall be recalled by the issuing judicial official when that official determines that probable cause did not exist for its issuance.

(2) Any criminal process other than a warrant or criminal summons may be recalled for good cause by any judicial official of the trial division in which it was issued. Good cause includes, without limitation, the fact that:

a. A copy of the process has been served on the defendant.

- b. All charges on which the process is based have been disposed.
 - c. The person named as the defendant in the process is not the person who committed the charged offense.
 - d. It has been determined that grounds for the issuance of an order for arrest did not exist, no longer exist or have been satisfied.
- (3) The disposition of all charges on which a process is based shall effect the recall, without further action by the court, of that process and of all other outstanding process issued in connection with the charges, including all orders for arrest issued for the defendant's failure to appear to answer the charges.

When the process was first created and exists only in paper form, the recall shall promptly be communicated by any reasonable means to each law enforcement agency known to be in possession of the original or a copy of the process, and each agency shall promptly return the process to the court, unserved. When the process is in the Electronic Repository, the recall shall promptly be entered in the Electronic Repository, and no further copies of the process shall be printed in paper form. The recall shall also be communicated by any reasonable means to each agency that is known to be in possession of a copy of the process in paper form and that does not have remote electronic access to the Electronic Repository."

SECTION 4. This act becomes effective January 1, 2003, and applies to all acts done on and after that date.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 24th day of July, 2002.

s/ Beverly E. Perdue
President of the Senate

s/ James B. Black
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ Michael F. Easley
Governor

Approved 11:43 a.m. this 1st day of August, 2002