

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2019

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SENATE BILL 375\*

Short Title: Death by Distribution. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Brown and Bishop (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 28, 2019

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO CREATE THE OFFENSES OF DEATH BY DISTRIBUTION OF CERTAIN  
CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES AND AGGRAVATED DEATH BY DISTRIBUTION OF  
CERTAIN CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES.

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that the number of deaths resulting from  
opioid-related overdoses has drastically increased over the past 20 years; and

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that the number of deaths resulting from  
opioid-related overdoses is unlikely to be reduced so long as the drug continues to be made  
available through illegal distribution by drug dealers; and

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that the legal distribution of opioids should  
only be through a prescription issued for a legitimate medical purpose by an individual  
practitioner acting in the usual course of his or her professional practice; and

Whereas, it is the intent of the General Assembly to strengthen the laws to act as a  
greater deterrent to persons who want to illegally distribute opioids and further exacerbate the  
opioid epidemic; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** Article 6 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes is amended by adding  
a new section to read:

**"§ 14-18.4. Death by distribution of certain controlled substances; aggravated death by  
distribution of certain controlled substances; penalties.**

(a) Legislative Intent. – The General Assembly recognizes that deaths due to the opioid  
epidemic are devastating families and communities across North Carolina. The General  
Assembly finds that the opioid crisis is overwhelming medical providers engaged in the lawful  
distribution of controlled substances and is straining prevention and treatment efforts. Therefore,  
the General Assembly enacts this law to encourage effective intervention by the criminal justice  
system to hold illegal drug dealers accountable for criminal conduct that results in death.

(b) Death by Distribution of Certain Controlled Substances. – A person is guilty of death  
by distribution of certain controlled substances if all of the following requirements are met:

- (1) The person unlawfully distributed at least one certain controlled substance to  
the victim.
- (2) The ingestion of the certain controlled substance or substances caused the  
death of the user.
- (3) The person's unlawful distribution of the certain controlled substance or  
substances was a proximate cause of the victim's death.
- (4) The person did not act with malice.



1       (c) Aggravated Death by Distribution of Certain Controlled Substances. – A person is  
2 guilty of aggravated death by distribution of certain controlled substances if all of the following  
3 requirements are met:

4           (1) The person unlawfully distributed at least one certain controlled substance to  
5 the victim.

6           (2) The ingestion of the certain controlled substance or substances caused the  
7 death of the user.

8           (3) The person's unlawful distribution of the certain controlled substance or  
9 substances was a proximate cause of the victim's death.

10          (4) The person did not act with malice.

11          (5) The person has a previous conviction under this section, G.S. 90-95(a)(1),  
12 90-95(e)(5), 90-95.1, 90-95.4, 90-95.6, or trafficking in violation of  
13 G.S. 90-95, or a prior conviction in any federal or state court in the United  
14 States that is substantially similar to an offense listed, within seven years of  
15 the date of the offense. In calculating the seven-year period under this  
16 subdivision, any period of time during which the person was incarcerated in a  
17 local, state, or federal detention center, jail, or prison shall be excluded.

18       (d) Certain Controlled Substance. – For the purposes of this section, the term "certain  
19 controlled substance" includes any opium, opiate, or opioid; any synthetic or natural salt,  
20 compound, derivative, or preparation of opium, opiate, or opioid; cocaine or any other substance  
21 described in G.S. 90-90(1)(d); methamphetamine; a depressant described in G.S. 90-92(a)(1); or  
22 a mixture of one or more of these substances.

23       (e) Lesser Included Offense. – Death by distribution of certain controlled substances  
24 constitutes a lesser included offense of aggravated death by distribution of certain controlled  
25 substances in violation of this section and of murder in violation of G.S. 14-17(b)(2).

26       (f) Penalties. – Unless the conduct is covered under some other provision of law  
27 providing greater punishment, the following classifications apply to the offenses set forth in this  
28 section:

29           (1) Death by distribution of certain controlled substances is a Class C felony.

30           (2) Aggravated death by distribution of certain controlled substances is a Class  
31 B2 felony."

32       **SECTION 2.** This act becomes effective December 1, 2019, and applies to offenses  
33 committed on or after that date.