

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

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SENATE BILL 697

Short Title: Law Enforcement Officer Fairness Act. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Alexander and Steinburg (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

April 8, 2021

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO STANDARDIZE THE DISMISSAL OF MUNICIPAL LAW ENFORCEMENT
3 OFFICERS.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **SECTION 1.** The General Statutes of North Carolina are amended by adding a new
6 Chapter to read:

7 **"Chapter 17F.**

8 **"Dismissal of Certain Law Enforcement Officers.**

9 **"§ 17F-1. Title of this act.**

10 This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Municipal Law Enforcement Accountability,
11 Transparency, and Fairness Act."

12 **"§ 17F-2. Applicability; exceptions.**

13 (a) Applicability. – This Chapter shall apply to all municipal law enforcement agencies
14 and includes unified city-county government police agencies.

15 (b) Exceptions. – This Chapter shall not apply to any law enforcement officer employed
16 by the State of North Carolina, a county, a local ABC board, a school board, a county police
17 department, a company police agency, a campus police agency, or any other law enforcement
18 agency created by the State as a special police agency.

19 **"§ 17F-3. Definitions.**

20 The following definitions apply to this Chapter:

21 (1) Career law enforcement officer. – An employee of a local entity who is in a
22 permanent position appointment and has been continuously employed by the
23 employing agency for the immediate 12 preceding months.

24 (2) Employing agency. – A law enforcement agency authorized by law for any
25 political subdivision of the State other than a county or a local ABC board.

26 (3) Law enforcement officer. – Defined in G.S. 143-166.30(a)(4).

27 **"§ 17F-4. Just cause; disciplinary actions for local law enforcement officers.**

28 (a) Just Cause. – The employing agency shall adopt, subject to the approval of the
29 municipality's governing authority, rules that define just cause.

30 (b) Dismissal of Officer. – No career local law enforcement officer may be dismissed by
31 an employing agency except for just cause.

32 (c) Notice and Opportunity to Be Heard. – If an employing agency considers matters that
33 could reasonably lead to the discharge of a law enforcement officer for punitive reasons, each
34 employing agency shall establish minimum procedures to ensure that any officer is afforded
35 notice of the charges and an opportunity to be heard prior to the imposition of the disciplinary
36 action against the officer. These procedures shall include, at a minimum, the right to a hearing



1 before a fair and impartial board or hearing officer, the right to be represented at the officer's
2 expense, the right to question any witnesses who give oral statements against the officer, the right
3 to call witnesses and present evidence, and the right to have all meetings recorded for use at any
4 supplemental adjudicatory hearing or court proceeding.

5 **"§ 17F-5. Review boards.**

6 (a) Review Boards Established. – All municipalities subject to the provisions of this
7 Chapter shall establish an impartial hearing officer or review board to review all disciplinary
8 actions appealed by an aggrieved law enforcement officer and hold hearings for formal
9 determination of a final decision of the review board.

10 (b) Representation. – A law enforcement officer has the right to be represented at the
11 officer's expense.

12 (c) Witnesses. – At any hearing before a review board established pursuant to subsection
13 (a) of this section, a law enforcement officer shall have the right to call witnesses and present all
14 evidence in the officer's favor and to question any witness who has provided information to the
15 employing agency that resulted in the commencement of the action before the review board. If a
16 witness fails to show up at the hearing required by this section, that statement or evidence shall
17 not be admitted, and the decision must be based on the remaining evidence. The rules of civil
18 procedure and evidence may be used, but are not required, for hearings held by review boards
19 pursuant to this section.

20 (d) Recordings; Transcripts. – All hearings shall be recorded for a final adjudication in
21 the event a court of competent jurisdiction requests the recording or a transcript of the recording.
22 Any party wishing to receive a copy of the recording of a hearing proceeding required by this
23 section shall be required to pay the cost of copying the recording only. A party wishing to receive
24 transcripts shall be required to pay the cost of transcription.

25 **"§ 17F-6. Certain review boards validated.**

26 Employing agencies using an established civil service system, agency review board, civilian
27 complaint board, or personnel board that meets the minimum requirements established in
28 G.S. 17F-4 or otherwise provides due process is in compliance with this Chapter.

29 **"§ 17F-7. Adoption by ordinance.**

30 Each municipality employing law enforcement officers shall adopt an ordinance that provides
31 the minimum rights required by this Chapter. The ordinance shall also include the composition,
32 powers, and duties of the review board required by G.S. 17F-5. The ordinance shall establish a
33 policy addressing dismissals, grievances by law enforcement officers, and the definition of "just
34 cause" for law enforcement officer dismissals."

35 **SECTION 2.** This act becomes effective December 1, 2021, and applies to
36 disciplinary actions taken against law enforcement officers employed by municipalities on or
37 after that date.