

Article 53.

Motion to Suppress Evidence.

**§ 15A-971. Definitions.**

As used in this Article the following definitions apply unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

- (1) Evidence. – When referring to matter in the possession of or available to a prosecutor, any tangible property or potential testimony which may be offered in evidence in a criminal action.
- (2) Potential Testimony. – Information or factual knowledge of a person who is or may be available as a witness. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1; 1975, c. 166, s. 27.)

**§ 15A-972. Motion to suppress evidence before trial in superior court in general.**

When an indictment has been returned or an information has been filed in the superior court, or a defendant has been bound over for trial in superior court, a defendant who is aggrieved may move to suppress evidence in accordance with the terms of this Article. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1.)

**§ 15A-973. Motion to suppress evidence in district court.**

In misdemeanor prosecutions in the district court, motions to suppress evidence should ordinarily be made during the course of the trial. A motion to suppress may be made prior to trial. With the consent of the prosecutor and the district court judge, the motion may be heard prior to trial. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1; 1975, c. 166, s. 27.)

**§ 15A-974. Exclusion or suppression of unlawfully obtained evidence.**

- (a) Upon timely motion, evidence must be suppressed if:
  - (1) Its exclusion is required by the Constitution of the United States or the Constitution of the State of North Carolina; or
  - (2) It is obtained as a result of a substantial violation of the provisions of this Chapter. In determining whether a violation is substantial, the court must consider all the circumstances, including:
    - a. The importance of the particular interest violated;
    - b. The extent of the deviation from lawful conduct;
    - c. The extent to which the violation was willful;
    - d. The extent to which exclusion will tend to deter future violations of this Chapter.

Evidence shall not be suppressed under this subdivision if the person committing the violation of the provision or provisions under this Chapter acted under the objectively reasonable, good faith belief that the actions were lawful.

- (b) The court, in making a determination whether or not evidence shall be suppressed under this section, shall make findings of fact and conclusions of law which shall be included in the record, pursuant to G.S. 15A-977(f). (1973, c. 1286, s. 1; 2011-6, s. 1.)

**§ 15A-975. Motion to suppress evidence in superior court prior to trial and during trial.**

- (a) In superior court, the defendant may move to suppress evidence only prior to trial unless the defendant did not have reasonable opportunity to make the motion before trial or unless a motion to suppress is allowed during trial under subsection (b) or (c).

(b) A motion to suppress may be made for the first time during trial when the State has failed to notify the defendant's counsel or, if he has none, the defendant, sooner than 20 working days before trial, of its intention to use the evidence, and the evidence is:

- (1) Evidence of a statement made by a defendant;
- (2) Evidence obtained by virtue of a search without a search warrant; or
- (3) Evidence obtained as a result of search with a search warrant when the defendant was not present at the time of the execution of the search warrant.

(c) If, after a pretrial determination and denial of the motion, the judge is satisfied, upon a showing by the defendant, that additional pertinent facts have been discovered by the defendant which he could not have discovered with reasonable diligence before the determination of the motion, he may permit the defendant to renew the motion before the trial or, if not possible because of the time of discovery of alleged new facts, during trial.

When a misdemeanor is appealed by the defendant for trial de novo in superior court, the State need not give the notice required by this section. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1.)

**§ 15A-976. Timing of pretrial suppression motion and hearing.**

(a) A motion to suppress evidence in superior court may be made at any time prior to trial except as provided in subsection (b).

(b) If the State gives notice not later than 20 working days before trial of its intention to use evidence and if the evidence is of a type listed in G.S. 15A-975(b), the defendant may move to suppress the evidence only if its motion is made not later than 10 working days following receipt of the notice from the State.

(c) When the motion is made before trial, the judge in his discretion may hear the motion before trial, on the date set for arraignment, on the date set for trial before a jury is impaneled, or during trial. He may rule on the motion before trial or reserve judgment until trial. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1.)

**§ 15A-977. Motion to suppress evidence in superior court; procedure.**

(a) A motion to suppress evidence in superior court made before trial must be in writing and a copy of the motion must be served upon the State. The motion must state the grounds upon which it is made. The motion must be accompanied by an affidavit containing facts supporting the motion. The affidavit may be based upon personal knowledge, or upon information and belief, if the source of the information and the basis for the belief are stated. The State may file an answer denying or admitting any of the allegations. A copy of the answer must be served on the defendant's counsel, or on the defendant if he has no counsel.

(b) The judge must summarily grant the motion to suppress evidence if:

- (1) The motion complies with the requirements of subsection (a), it states grounds which require exclusion of the evidence, and the State concedes the truth of allegations of fact which support the motion; or
- (2) The State stipulates that the evidence sought to be suppressed will not be offered in evidence in any criminal action or proceeding against the defendant.

(c) The judge may summarily deny the motion to suppress evidence if:

- (1) The motion does not allege a legal basis for the motion; or
- (2) The affidavit does not as a matter of law support the ground alleged.

(d) If the motion is not determined summarily the judge must make the determination after a hearing and finding of facts. Testimony at the hearing must be under oath.

(e) A motion to suppress made during trial may be made in writing or orally and may be determined in the same manner as when made before trial. The hearing, if held, must be out of the presence of the jury.

(f) The judge must set forth in the record his findings of facts and conclusions of law. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1.)

**§ 15A-978. Motion to suppress evidence in superior court or district court; challenge of probable cause supporting search on grounds of truthfulness; when identity of informant must be disclosed.**

(a) A defendant may contest the validity of a search warrant and the admissibility of evidence obtained thereunder by contesting the truthfulness of the testimony showing probable cause for its issuance. The defendant may contest the truthfulness of the testimony by cross-examination or by offering evidence. For the purposes of this section, truthful testimony is testimony which reports in good faith the circumstances relied on to establish probable cause.

(b) In any proceeding on a motion to suppress evidence pursuant to this section in which the truthfulness of the testimony presented to establish probable cause is contested and the testimony includes a report of information furnished by an informant whose identity is not disclosed in the testimony, the defendant is entitled to be informed of the informant's identity unless:

- (1) The evidence sought to be suppressed was seized by authority of a search warrant or incident to an arrest with warrant; or
- (2) There is corroboration of the informant's existence independent of the testimony in question.

The provisions of subdivisions (b)(1) and (b)(2) do not apply to situations in which disclosure of an informant's identity is required by controlling constitutional decisions.

(c) This section does not limit the right of a defendant to contest the truthfulness of testimony offered in support of a search made without a warrant. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1.)

**§ 15A-979. Motion to suppress evidence in superior and district court; orders of suppression; effects of orders and of failure to make motion.**

(a) Upon granting a motion to suppress evidence the judge must order that the evidence in question be excluded in the criminal action pending against the defendant. When the order is based upon the ground of an unlawful search and seizure and excludes tangible property unlawfully taken from the defendant's possession, and when the property is not contraband or otherwise subject to lawful retention by the State or another, the judge must order that the property be restored to the defendant at the conclusion of the trial including all appeals.

(b) An order finally denying a motion to suppress evidence may be reviewed upon an appeal from a judgment of conviction, including a judgment entered upon a plea of guilty.

(c) An order by the superior court granting a motion to suppress prior to trial is appealable to the appellate division of the General Court of Justice prior to trial upon certificate by the prosecutor to the judge who granted the motion that the appeal is not taken for the purpose of delay and that the evidence is essential to the case. The appeal is to the appellate court that would have jurisdiction if the defendant were found guilty of the charge and received the maximum punishment. If there are multiple charges affected by a motion to suppress, the ruling is appealable to the court with jurisdiction over the offense carrying the highest punishment.

(d) A motion to suppress evidence made pursuant to this Article is the exclusive method of challenging the admissibility of evidence upon the grounds specified in G.S. 15A-974. (1973, c. 1286, s. 1; 1975, c. 166, s. 27; 1979, c. 723.)

**§ 15A-980. Right to suppress use of certain prior convictions obtained in violation of right to counsel.**

(a) A defendant has the right to suppress the use of a prior conviction that was obtained in violation of his right to counsel if its use by the State is to impeach the defendant or if its use will:

- (1) Increase the degree of crime of which the defendant would be guilty; or
- (2) Result in a sentence of imprisonment that otherwise would not be imposed; or
- (3) Result in a lengthened sentence of imprisonment.

(b) A defendant who has grounds to suppress the use of a conviction in evidence at a trial or other proceeding as set forth in (a) must do so by motion made in accordance with the procedure in this Article. A defendant waives his right to suppress use of a prior conviction if he does not move to suppress it.

(c) When a defendant has moved to suppress use of a prior conviction under the terms of subsection (a), he has the burden of proving by the preponderance of the evidence that the conviction was obtained in violation of his right to counsel. To prevail, he must prove that at the time of the conviction he was indigent, had no counsel, and had not waived his right to counsel. If the defendant proves that a prior conviction was obtained in violation of his right to counsel, the judge must suppress use of the conviction at trial or in any other proceeding if its use will contravene the provisions of subsection (a). (1983, c. 513, s. 1.)