

Article 25.

Small Estates.

§ 28A-25-1. Collection of property by affidavit when decedent dies intestate.

(a) When a decedent dies intestate leaving personal property, less liens and encumbrances thereon, not exceeding twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) in value, at any time after 30 days from the date of death, any person indebted to the decedent or having possession of tangible personal property or an instrument evidencing a debt, obligation, stock or chose in action belonging to the decedent shall make payment of the indebtedness or deliver the tangible personal property or an instrument evidencing a debt, obligation, stock or chose in action to a person claiming to be the public administrator appointed pursuant to G.S. 28A-12-1, or an heir or creditor of the decedent, not disqualified under G.S. 28A-4-2, upon being presented a certified copy of an affidavit filed in accordance with subsection (b) and made by or on behalf of the heir or creditor or the public administrator stating:

- (1) The name and address of the affiant and the fact that the affiant is the public administrator or an heir or creditor of the decedent;
- (2) The name of the decedent and the decedent's residence at time of death;
- (3) The date and place of death of the decedent;
- (4) That 30 days have elapsed since the death of the decedent;
- (5) That the value of all the personal property owned by the estate of the decedent, less liens and encumbrances thereon, does not exceed twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000);
- (6) That no application or petition for appointment of a personal representative is pending or has been granted in any jurisdiction;
- (7) The names and addresses of those persons who are entitled, under the provisions of the Intestate Succession Act, to the personal property of the decedent and their relationship, if any, to the decedent; and
- (8) A description sufficient to identify each tract of real property owned by the decedent at the time of the decedent's death.

In those cases in which the affiant is the surviving spouse and sole heir of the decedent, not disqualified under G.S. 28A-4-2, the property described in this subsection that may be collected pursuant to this section may exceed twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) in value but shall not exceed thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) in value, after reduction for any spousal allowance paid to the surviving spouse pursuant to G.S. 30-15. In such cases, the affidavit shall state: (i) the name and address of the affiant and the fact that the affiant is the surviving spouse and is entitled, under the provisions of the Intestate Succession Act, to all of the property of the decedent; (ii) that the value of all of the personal property owned by the estate of the decedent, less liens and encumbrances thereon, does not exceed thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000); and (iii) the information required under subdivisions (2), (3), (4), (6), and (8) of this subsection.

(b) Prior to the recovery of any assets of the decedent, a copy of the affidavit described in subsection (a) shall be filed in the office of the clerk of superior court of the county where the decedent was domiciled at the time of death. The affidavit shall be filed by the clerk upon payment of the fee provided in G.S. 7A-307, shall be indexed in the index to estates, and a copy thereof shall be mailed by the clerk to the persons shown in the affidavit as entitled to the personal property.

(c) The presentation of an affidavit as provided in subsection (a) shall be sufficient to require the transfer to the affiant or the affiant's designee of the title and license to a motor vehicle

registered in the name of the decedent owner; the ownership rights of a savings account or checking account in a bank in the name of the decedent owner; the ownership rights of a savings account or share certificate in a credit union, building and loan association, or savings and loan association in the name of the decedent owner; the ownership rights in any stock or security registered on the books of a corporation in the name of a decedent owner; or any other property or contract right owned by decedent at the time of the decedent's death. (1973, c. 1329, s. 3; 1975, c. 300, s. 9; 1983, c. 65, s. 1; c. 713, s. 21; 1985, c. 651, s. 1; 1989, c. 407, s. 1; 1995, c. 262, s. 1; 2009-175, s. 1; 2011-344, s. 4.)

§ 28A-25-1.1. Collection of property by affidavit when decedent dies testate.

(a) When a decedent dies testate leaving personal property, less liens and encumbrances thereon, not exceeding twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) in value, at any time after 30 days from the date of death, any person indebted to the decedent or having possession of tangible personal property or an instrument evidencing a debt, obligation, stock or chose in action belonging to the decedent shall make payment of the indebtedness or deliver the tangible personal property or an instrument evidencing a debt, obligation, stock or chose in action to a person claiming to be the public administrator appointed pursuant to G.S. 28A-12-1, a person named or designated as executor in the will, devisee, heir or creditor, of the decedent, not disqualified under G.S. 28A-4-2, upon being presented a certified copy of an affidavit filed in accordance with subsection (b) and made by or on behalf of the heir, the person named or designated as executor in the will of the decedent, the creditor, the public administrator, or the devisee, stating:

- (1) The name and address of the affiant and the fact that the affiant is the public administrator, a person named or designated as executor in the will, devisee, heir or creditor, of the decedent;
- (2) The name of the decedent and the decedent's residence at time of death;
- (3) The date and place of death of the decedent;
- (4) That 30 days have elapsed since the death of the decedent;
- (5) That the decedent died testate leaving personal property, less liens and encumbrances thereon, not exceeding twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) in value;
- (6) That the decedent's will has been admitted to probate in the court of the proper county and a duly certified copy of the will has been recorded in each county in which is located any real property owned by the decedent at the time of the decedent's death;
- (7) That a certified copy of the decedent's will is attached to the affidavit;
- (8) That no application or petition for appointment of a personal representative is pending or has been granted in any jurisdiction;
- (9) The names and addresses of those persons who are entitled, under the provisions of the will, or if applicable, of the Intestate Succession Act, to the property of the decedent; and their relationship, if any, to the decedent; and
- (10) A description sufficient to identify each tract of real property owned by the decedent at the time of the decedent's death.

In those cases in which the affiant is the surviving spouse, is entitled to all of the property of the decedent, and is not disqualified under G.S. 28A-4-2, the property described in this subsection that may be collected pursuant to this section may exceed twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) in value but shall not exceed thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) in value, after reduction for any

spousal allowance paid to the surviving spouse pursuant to G.S. 30-15. In such cases, the affidavit shall state: (i) the name and address of the affiant and the fact that the affiant is the surviving spouse and is entitled, under the provisions of the decedent's will, or if applicable, of the Intestate Succession Act, to all of the property of the decedent; (ii) that the decedent died testate leaving personal property, less liens and encumbrances thereon, not exceeding thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000); and (iii) the information required under subdivisions (2), (3), (4), (6), (7), (8), and (10) of this subsection.

(b) Prior to the recovery of any assets of the decedent, a copy of the affidavit described in subsection (a) shall be filed in the office of the clerk of superior court of the county where the decedent was domiciled at the time of death. The affidavit shall be filed by the clerk upon payment of the fee provided in G.S. 7A-307, shall be indexed in the index to estates, and a copy shall be mailed by the clerk to the persons shown in the affidavit as entitled to the property.

(c) The presentation of an affidavit as provided in subsection (a) shall be sufficient to require the transfer to the affiant or the affiant's designee of the title and license to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the decedent owner; the ownership rights of a savings account or checking account in a bank in the name of the decedent owner; the ownership rights of a savings account or share certificate in a credit union, building and loan association, or savings and loan association in the name of the decedent owner; the ownership rights in any stock or security registered on the books of a corporation in the name of a decedent owner; or any other property or contract right owned by decedent at the time of the decedent's death. (1985, c. 651, s. 2; 1987, c. 670, s. 1; 1989, c. 407, s. 2; 1995, c. 262, s. 2; 2009-175, s. 2; 2011-344, s. 4; 2012-18, s. 3.9.)

§ 28A-25-2. Effect of affidavit.

The person paying, delivering, transferring or issuing personal property or the evidence thereof pursuant to an affidavit meeting the requirements of G.S. 28A-25-1(a) or G.S. 28A-25-1.1(a) is discharged and released to the same extent as if the person dealt with a duly qualified personal representative of the decedent. The person is not required to see to the application of the personal property or evidence thereof or to inquire into the truth of any statement in the affidavit. If any person to whom an affidavit is delivered refuses to pay, deliver, transfer, or issue any personal property or evidence thereof, it may be recovered or its payment, delivery, transfer, or issuance compelled upon proof of their right in an action brought for that purpose by or on behalf of the persons entitled thereto. The court costs and attorney's fee incident to the action shall be taxed against the person whose refusal to comply with the provisions of G.S. 28A-25-1(a) or G.S. 28A-25-1.1(a) made the action necessary. The heir or creditor to whom payment, delivery, transfer or issuance is made is answerable and accountable therefor to any duly qualified personal representative or collector of the decedent's estate or to any other person having an interest in the estate. (1973, c. 1329, s. 3; 1985, c. 651, s. 3; 1987, c. 670, s. 2; 2011-344, s. 4.)

§ 28A-25-3. Disbursement and distribution of property collected by affidavit.

(a) If there has been no personal representative or collector appointed by the clerk of superior court, the affiant who has collected personal property of the decedent by affidavit pursuant to G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1 shall:

(1) Disburse and distribute the same in the following order:

- a. To the payment of the surviving spouse's year's allowance and the children's year's allowance assigned in accordance with G.S. 30-15 through G.S. 30-33;
 - b. To the payment of the debts and claims against the estate of the decedent in the order of priority set forth in G.S. 28A-19-6, or to the reimbursement of any person who has already made payment thereof;
 - c. To the distribution of the remainder of the personal property to the persons entitled thereto under the provisions of the will or of the Intestate Succession Act; and
- (2) File an affidavit with the clerk of superior court that the affiant has collected the personal property of the decedent and the manner in which the affiant has disbursed and distributed the same. This final affidavit shall be filed within 90 days of the date of filing of the qualifying affidavit provided for in G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1. If the affiant cannot file the final affidavit within 90 days, the affiant shall file a report with the clerk within that time period stating the affiant's reasons. Upon determining that the affiant has good reason not to file the final affidavit within 90 days, the clerk may extend the time for filing up to one year from the date of filing the qualifying affidavit.

(b) Nothing in this section shall be construed as changing the rule of G.S. 28A-15-1 and G.S. 28A-15-5 rendering both real and personal property, without preference or priority, available for the discharge of debts and other claims against the estate of the decedent. If it appears that it may be in the best interest of the estate to sell, lease, or mortgage any real property to obtain money for the payment of debts or other claims against the decedent's estate, the affiant shall petition the clerk of superior court for the appointment of a personal representative to conclude the administration of the decedent's estate pursuant to G.S. 28A-25-5. (1973, c. 1329, s. 3; 1983, c. 711, s. 1; 1985, c. 651, s. 4; 1987, c. 670, s. 3; 1989, c. 407, s. 3; 2011-344, s. 4.)

§ 28A-25-4. Clerk may compel compliance.

If any affiant who has collected personal property of the decedent by affidavit pursuant to G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1 shall fail to make distribution or file affidavit as required by G.S. 28A-25-3, the clerk of superior court may, upon motion of the clerk of superior court or at the request of any interested person, issue an attachment against the affiant for a contempt and commit the affiant until the affiant makes proper distribution and files the affidavit. In addition to or in lieu of filing this attachment, the clerk may require the affiant to post a bond conditioned as provided in G.S. 28A-8-2. (1973, c. 1329, s. 3; 1983, c. 711, s. 2; 1985, c. 651, s. 5; 1987, c. 670, s. 4; 1989, c. 407, s. 4; 2011-344, s. 4.)

§ 28A-25-5. Subsequently appointed personal representative or collector.

Nothing in this Article shall preclude any interested person, including the affiant, from petitioning the clerk of superior court for the appointment of a personal representative or collector to conclude the administration of the decedent's estate. If such is done, the affiant who has been collecting personal property by affidavit shall cease to do so, shall deliver all assets in the affiant's possession to the personal representative, and shall render a proper accounting to the personal representative or collector. A copy of the accounting shall also be filed with the clerk having

jurisdiction over the personal representative or collector. (1973, c. 1329, s. 3; 1975, c. 300, s. 10; 1985, c. 651, s. 6; 1987, c. 670, s. 5; 2011-344, s. 4.)

§ 28A-25-6. Payment to clerk of money owed decedent.

(a) As an alternative to the small estate settlement procedures of this Article, any person indebted to a decedent may satisfy such indebtedness by paying the amount of the debt to the clerk of the superior court of the county of the domicile of the decedent:

- (1) If no administrator has been appointed, and
- (2) If the amount owed by such person does not exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000), and
- (3) If the sum tendered to the clerk would not make the aggregate sum which has come into the clerk's hands belonging to the decedent exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000).

(b) Such payments may not be made to the clerk if the total amount paid or tendered with respect to any one decedent would exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000), even though disbursements have been made so that the aggregate amount in the clerk's hands at any one time would not exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000).

(c) If the sum tendered pursuant to this section would make the aggregate sum coming into the clerk's hands with respect to any one decedent exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000) the clerk shall appoint an administrator, or the sum may be administered under the preceding sections of this Article.

(d) If it appears to the clerk after making a preliminary survey that disbursements pursuant to this section would not exhaust funds received pursuant to this section, the clerk may, in the clerk's discretion, appoint an administrator, or the funds may be administered under the preceding sections of this Article.

(e) The receipt from the clerk of the superior court of a payment purporting to be made pursuant to this section is a full release to the debtor for the payment so made.

(f) If no administrator has been appointed, the clerk of superior court shall disburse the money received under this section for the following purposes and in the following order:

- (1) To pay the surviving spouse's year's allowance and children's year's allowance assigned in accordance with law;
- (2), (3) Repealed by Session Laws 1981, c. 383, s. 3.
- (4) All other claims shall be disbursed according to the order set out in G.S. 28A-19-6.

Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this subsection, the clerk shall pay, out of funds provided the deceased pursuant to G.S. 111-18 and Part 3 of Article 2 of Chapter 108A of the General Statutes of North Carolina, any lawful claims for care provided by an adult care home to the deceased, incurred not more than 90 days prior to the deceased's death. After the death of a spouse who died intestate and after the disbursements have been made in accordance with this subsection, the balance in the clerk's hands belonging to the estate of the decedent shall be paid to the surviving spouse, and if there is no surviving spouse, the clerk shall pay it to the heirs in proportion to their respective interests.

(g) The clerk shall not be required to publish notice to creditors.

(h) Whenever an administrator is appointed after a clerk of superior court has received any money pursuant to this section, the clerk shall pay to the administrator all funds which have not been disbursed. The clerk shall receive no commissions for payments made to the administrator,

and the administrator shall receive no commissions for receiving such payments. (1921, c. 93; Ex. Sess. 1921, c. 65; C.S., s. 65(a); Ex. Sess. 1924, cc. 15, 58; 1927, c. 7; 1929, cc. 63, 71, 121; 1931, c. 21; 1933, cc. 16, 94; 1935, cc. 69, 96, 367; 1937, cc. 13, 31, 55, 121, 336, 377; 1939, cc. 383, 384; 1941, c. 176; 1943, cc. 24, 114, 138, 560; 1945, cc. 152, 178, 555; 1947, cc. 203, 237; 1949, cc. 17, 81, 691, 762; 1951, c. 380, s. 1; 1955, c. 1246, s. 103; 1957, c. 491; 1959, c. 795, ss. 1-4; 1965, c. 576, s. 1; 1973, c. 23; c. 1329, s. 1; 1975, c. 344; 1979, c. 163; c. 762, s. 1; 1981, c. 383, s. 3; 1983, c. 65, s. 2; 1987, c. 282, s. 6; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1015, s. 1; 1995, c. 535, s. 2; 2011-344, s. 4.)

§ 28A-25-7. Removal of tangible personal property by landlord after death of residential tenant.

(a) When a decedent who is the sole occupant of a dwelling unit dies leaving tangible personal property in the dwelling unit, the landlord may take possession of the property upon the filing of an affidavit that complies with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section if all of the following conditions have been met:

- (1) At least 10 days has elapsed from the date the paid rental period for the dwelling unit has expired.
- (2) No personal representative, collector, or receiver has been appointed for the decedent's estate under the provisions of this Chapter, Chapter 28B, or Chapter 28C of the General Statutes in the county in which the dwelling unit is located.
- (3) No affidavit related to the decedent's estate has been filed under the provisions of G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1 in the county in which the dwelling unit is located.

(b) The affidavit required by subsection (a) of this section shall be on a form approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts and supplied by the clerk of court. The affidavit shall state all of the following:

- (1) The name and address of the affiant and the fact that the affiant is the lessor of the dwelling unit.
- (2) The name of the decedent and the fact that the decedent was the lessee and sole occupant of the dwelling unit and died leaving tangible personal property in the dwelling unit. The affiant shall attach to the affidavit a copy of the decedent's death certificate.
- (3) The address of the dwelling unit.
- (4) The date of the decedent's death.
- (5) The date the paid rental period expired and the fact that at least 10 days has elapsed since that date.
- (6) The affiant's good faith estimate of the value of the tangible personal property remaining in the dwelling unit. The affiant shall attach to the affidavit an inventory of the property which shall include, at a minimum, the categories of furniture, clothing and accessories, and miscellaneous items.
- (7) That no personal representative, collector, or receiver has been appointed for the decedent's estate under the provisions of this Chapter, Chapter 28B, or Chapter 28C of the General Statutes in the county in which the dwelling unit is located and that no affidavit has been filed in the county under the provisions of G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1.

- (8) The name of the person identified in the rental application, lease agreement, or other landlord document as the authorized person to contact in the event of the death or emergency of the tenant; that the affiant has made a good faith attempt to contact that person to urge that action be taken to administer the decedent's estate; and that either the affiant was unsuccessful in contacting the person or, if contacted, the person has not taken action to administer the decedent's estate. The affiant shall state the efforts made to contact the person identified in the rental application, lease agreement, or other landlord document.

(c) The affidavit shall be filed in the office of the clerk of court in the county in which the dwelling unit is located. The affidavit shall be filed by the clerk upon the landlord's payment of the fee of thirty dollars (\$30.00) and shall be indexed in the index to estates. The landlord shall mail a copy of the affidavit to the person identified in the rental application, lease agreement, or other landlord document as the authorized person to contact in the event of the death or emergency of the tenant. If no contact person is identified in the rental application, lease agreement, or other landlord document, the landlord shall cause notice of the filing of the affidavit to be posted at the door of the landlord's primary rental office or the place where the landlord conducts business and at the county courthouse in the area designated by the clerk for the posting of notices.

(d) The filing of an affidavit that complies with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall be sufficient to require the transfer of the property remaining in the decedent's dwelling unit to the landlord. Upon the transfer, the landlord may remove the property from the dwelling unit and deliver it for storage to any storage warehouse in the county in which the dwelling unit is located or in an adjoining county if no storage warehouse is located in that county. The landlord may also store the property in the landlord's own storage facility. Notwithstanding any provision of Chapter 42 of the General Statutes, after removing the property from the dwelling unit as provided in this subsection, the landlord shall be in possession of the dwelling unit and may let the unit as the landlord deems fit.

(e) If, at least 90 days after the landlord filed the affidavit required by subsection (a) of this section, no personal representative, collector, or receiver has been appointed under the provisions of this Chapter, Chapter 28B, or Chapter 28C of the General Statutes in the county in which the dwelling unit is located and no affidavit has been filed in the county under the provisions of G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1, the landlord may take any of the following actions related to the decedent's property:

- (1) Sell the property as provided in subsection (f) of this section.
- (2) Deliver the property into the custody of a nonprofit organization regularly providing free, or at a nominal price, clothing and household furnishings to people in need for disposition in the normal course of the organization's operations. The organization shall not be liable to anyone for the disposition of the property.

(f) If the landlord delivers the property to a nonprofit organization as authorized in subdivision (2) of subsection (e) of this section, the landlord shall provide an accounting to the clerk stating the nature of the action and the date on which the action was taken. A landlord who elects to sell the property as authorized in subdivision (1) of subsection (e) of this section may do so at a public or private sale. Whether the sale is public or private, the landlord shall, at least seven days prior to the day of sale, give written notice to the clerk and post written notice of the sale in the area designated by the clerk for the posting of notices and at the door of the landlord's primary rental office or the place where the landlord conducts business stating the date, time, and place of

the sale, and that any surplus of proceeds from the sale, after payment of unpaid rents, damages, packing and storage fees, filing fees, and sale costs shall be delivered to the clerk. The landlord may apply the proceeds of the sale to the unpaid rents, damages, packing and storage fees, filing fees, and sale costs. Any surplus from the sale shall be paid to the clerk, and the landlord shall provide an accounting to the clerk showing the manner in which the proceeds of the sale were applied. The clerk shall administer the funds in the same manner as provided in G.S. 28A-25-6.

(g) If, at any time after the landlord files the affidavit required by subsection (a) of this section but before the landlord takes any of the actions authorized in subsection (e) of this section, the landlord is presented with letters of appointment or another document issued by a court indicating that a personal representative, collector, or receiver has been appointed for the decedent's estate or an affidavit filed under the provisions of G.S. 28A-25-1 or G.S. 28A-25-1.1, the landlord shall deliver the decedent's property to the personal representative, collector, or receiver appointed or to the person who filed the affidavit.

(h) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) through (g) of this section, if the decedent dies leaving tangible personal property of five hundred dollar (\$500.00) value or less in the dwelling unit, the landlord may, without filing an affidavit, deliver the property into the custody of a nonprofit organization regularly providing free, or at a nominal price, clothing and household furnishings to people in need upon that organization agreeing to identify and separately store the property for 30 days and to release the property to a person authorized by law to act on behalf of the decedent at no charge within the 30-day period. Prior to delivering the property to the nonprofit organization, the landlord shall prepare an inventory of the property which shall include, at a minimum, the categories of furniture, clothing and accessories, and miscellaneous items. A landlord electing to act under this subsection shall immediately send a notice by first-class mail containing the name and address of the property recipient and a copy of the inventory to the person identified in the rental application, lease agreement, or other landlord document as the authorized person to contact in the event of the death or emergency of the tenant and shall post the same notice for 30 days or more at the door of the landlord's primary rental office or the place where the landlord conducts business. The notice posted shall not include an inventory of the property. Any nonprofit organization agreeing to receive personal property under this subsection shall not be liable to the decedent's estate for the disposition of the property, provided that the property has been separately identified and stored for release to a person authorized by law to act on behalf of the decedent for a period of 30 days.

(i) If any lessor, landlord, or agent seizes possession of the decedent's tangible personal property in any manner not in accordance with the provisions of this section, any person authorized by law to act on behalf of the decedent shall be entitled to recover possession of the property or compensation for the value of the property and, in any action brought by any person authorized by law to act on behalf of the decedent, the landlord shall be liable to the decedent's estate for actual damages, but not including punitive damages, treble damages, or damages for emotional distress.

(j) The procedure authorized in this section may be used as an alternative to a summary ejectment action under Chapter 42 of the General Statutes. A landlord shall, in his or her discretion, determine whether to proceed under the provisions of this section or under Chapter 42 of the General Statutes. (2012-17, s. 7.)