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Contents

Preface ix

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1
Purposes of the Reporting Law 3
Notes 7

Chapter 2
History of the Reporting Law 9
Background 9
North Carolina Law 10
Current Law 12
Notes 12
PART 2. KEY DEFINITIONS

Chapter 3
Significance of the Definitions 17
Notes 18

Chapter 4
The People Defined: Juvenile, Parent, Guardian, Custodian, and Custodian, and
Caretaker 21
Which Children Are Covered? 21
Whose Conduct Is Covered? 22
Notes 26

Chapter 5
The Conditions Defined: Neglect, Abuse, Dependency, and Maltreatment 29

Neglect 31
Lack of Proper Care and Supervision 31
Inappropriate Discipline 32
Abandonment 33
Lack of Necessary Medical or Remedial Care 34
Injurious Environment 36
Illegal Placement 37

Abuse 39
Causing or Allowing Serious Injury 40
Cruelty 40
Sexual Abuse 41
Emotional Abuse 43
Contributing to Delinquency 44

Dependency 44

Maltreatment 45

Difficulty in Applying the Definitions—An Example 46
Notes 49
PART 3. RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS OF REPORTERS

Chapter 6
Who Must Report  57
  General Rule  57
  Confidential and Privileged Communications  58
    Attorneys  58
    Judges  59
    Religious Officials  61
    Researchers  62
  Summary  63
  Notes  64

Chapter 7
Deciding to Report  67
  Cause to Suspect  67
  Guidelines  69
  Notes  71

Chapter 8
How to Report  73
  What to Include  74
  Anonymous Reports  74
  Reports by Institutions  75
  Reports about a Child in Another State  75
  Reports about Missing Children  76
  Notes  77

Chapter 9
Legal Rights of the Reporter  79
  Confidentiality  79
  Immunity for Reporting, Cooperating, or Testifying  81
  Notification and Review  82
  Notes  84
Chapter 12

Review Procedures  119
Review of Decision to Screen Out a Report  119
Informal Review of Department’s Determination after an Assessment  120
Formal Review of Case Decisions  120
  Requesting Formal Review  121
  Timing of Review  121
  Review Process and Conclusion  122
Review of Agency Practices or Community Issues  122
  County Social Services Boards  122
  State Division of Social Services  123
  Community Child Protection Teams  123
Notes  125

Chapter 13

Juvenile Court Procedures  127
Abuse, Neglect, or Dependency Petition  127
Prehearing Custody  128
Court Representation  130
  Child’s Guardian ad Litem  130
  Representation for Parents  131
Stages in Juvenile Cases  131
  Adjudication  131
  Disposition  132
  Review Hearings  133
Authority over Parents  133
Notes  134

PART 5. ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES

Chapter 14

Schools and School Personnel  139
  Reports to Social Services by School Personnel  139
  Cooperative Agreements  142
    Sample Provisions for Cooperative Agreements  143
  Reporting in Relation to License Suspension and Revocation  146
  Reporting Certain Criminal Acts  147
Notes  148
Chapter 15

**Health and Mental Health Professionals and Facilities** 151
- Reporting 151
- Professional Ethics and Reporting Responsibilities 152
- “Baby Doe”: Disabled Infants with Life-Threatening Conditions 155
- Substance-Exposed Infants 156
- Emergency Custody in Abuse Cases 158
  - Procedures 158
  - Time Limits and Juvenile Court Action 159
- Treating Child without Parent’s Consent 160
- Judicial Authority for Emergency Medical Treatment When Parent Objects 161
- Child Medical Evaluation Program/
  Child Family Evaluation Program 163
- Notes 163

**Conclusion** 167

**Appendix A. Articles 1 and 3 of the North Carolina Juvenile Code** 169

**Appendix B. Selected Internet Sites** 189
- North Carolina—Governmental 189
- North Carolina—Non-Governmental 191
- Federal and National 191
Preface

The material in this book reflects legislative changes to the North Carolina Juvenile Code through the 2013 session of the North Carolina General Assembly. Since publication of the 2003 edition of this book, the reporting law itself has been amended twice. In 2005, the word “assessment” replaced the term “investigation” to describe actions taken by a county department of social services when it receives a report of suspected abuse, neglect, dependency, or death by maltreatment. In 2013, the legislature for the first time provided criminal penalties for knowingly or wantonly failing to make a report, or preventing someone else from making a report, when the statute requires one. Changes in related laws and some court decisions also contribute to the need for this new edition.

This book should be a useful reference for teachers, counselors, principals, and other school personnel; mental health professionals; nurses, doctors, and other medical personnel; law enforcement officials; child care providers; and social workers. But the information in this book is important for everyone in North Carolina, regardless of profession, because the reporting law it discusses applies to everyone. The book may be useful as a training aid. It focuses on the law, however, and does not attempt to address such topics as medical and psychological indicators of abuse and neglect. Those subjects also should be considered critical components of training in this area.
The purposes of the book are

• to help readers understand when they are required to make reports;
• to explain how to make a report—both when the law requires that a report be made and when, even though a report is not required legally, a person feels that one should be made;
• to describe what happens after someone makes a report;
• to answer some of the questions people ask frequently about the reporting law; and
• to provide broader access to the exact wording of the reporting law and related statutes.

Readers should recognize that while the laws relating to child abuse and neglect are important, these are not primarily legal problems. Neither are they problems that can be addressed solely through county social services departments and the juvenile courts. This book is written with the hope that those who read it will be better informed about the reporting law and more aware that the responsibility for protecting children belongs to whole communities.

A grant from the Governor’s Crime Commission of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety provided financial support for the production and distribution of this book. The School of Government greatly appreciates the commission’s contribution to making this information widely available in the state. Many School of Government staff members contributed to the production of this book. If I tried to name them all I surely would omit someone whose contributions have been critical. All of them have my deep appreciation.

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