

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2021

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HOUSE BILL 897

Short Title: Address False Campaign Claims. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Szoka, Meyer, Bell, and Reives (Primary Sponsors).  
*For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.*

Referred to: Judiciary 1, if favorable, Appropriations, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and  
Operations of the House

May 10, 2021

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
2 AN ACT TO EXPEDITIOUSLY ADDRESS ACCUSATIONS OF FALSE CLAIMS MADE  
3 BY POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THAT PURPOSE.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **SECTION 1.(a)** Article 17 of Chapter 1 of the General Statutes is amended by adding  
6 a new section to read:

7 "**§ 1-149.1. Special motion to strike; purpose; availability; burden; appeal.**

8 (a) Purpose. – The General Assembly finds that the public has an interest in knowing  
9 whether campaign claims are false or defamatory prior to casting votes in an election. This public  
10 interest should be balanced against political candidates' right to freedom of speech. Therefore, it  
11 is the purpose of this section to expedite resolution of certain lawsuits against political candidates  
12 and campaigns.

13 (b) Motion. – A claim for relief against a person arising from any act of the person which  
14 could reasonably be construed as an act in furtherance of the person's seeking elected public  
15 office shall be subject to a motion to dismiss or strike unless the court determines that (i) the  
16 nonmoving party's claim has a substantial basis in law or a substantial argument for modifying  
17 the law and (ii) the nonmoving party has established that there is a probability of that party  
18 prevailing on the claim.

19 (c) Determination. – In making the determination under subsection (b) of this section, the  
20 court shall consider the pleadings and supporting and opposing affidavits stating the facts upon  
21 which the liability or defense is based. If the court determines that the nonmoving party under  
22 subsection (b) of this section has established a substantial basis or argument for the claim and a  
23 probability that the nonmoving party would prevail on the claim, neither that determination nor  
24 the fact of the determination shall be admissible in evidence at any later stage of the case or in  
25 any subsequent action, and no burden of proof or degree of proof otherwise applicable shall be  
26 affected by the determination in any later stage of the case or in any subsequent proceeding.

27 (d) Stay. – All discovery and any pending hearings or motions in the action shall be stayed  
28 upon the filing of a motion to dismiss or a motion to strike made under this section until a final  
29 decision on the motion, except that the court, on noticed motion and for good cause shown, may  
30 order that specified discovery or other hearings or motions be conducted notwithstanding this  
31 subsection.

32 (e) Priority of Calendaring. – The hearing of the motion shall be advanced and take  
33 precedence over all other causes upon the court calendar, as follows:



1           (1)    If the motion is filed within 30 days of the election day for the public office,  
2           the court shall hear the motion within five days of its filing. The court shall  
3           issue its order on the motion within five days of the hearing.

4           (2)    If the motion is filed between 31 and 60 days before the election day for the  
5           public office, the court shall hear the motion within 10 days of its filing. The  
6           court shall issue its order on the motion as soon as practicable, but in no case  
7           shall that period exceed 10 days.

8           (3)    If the motion is filed between 61 and 90 days before the election day for the  
9           public office, the court shall hear the motion within 15 days of its filing. The  
10          court shall issue its order on the motion as soon as practicable, but in no case  
11          shall that period exceed 15 days.

12          (4)    If the motion is filed more than 91 days before the election day for the public  
13          office, the court shall hear the motion within 21 days of its filing. The court  
14          shall issue its order on the motion as soon as practicable.

15          (f)    Fees and Costs. – The court shall award attorneys' fees and costs of litigation, in an  
16          amount to be determined by the court based on the facts and circumstances of the case, as follows:

17               (1)    To a prevailing moving party on a motion to strike under this section.

18               (2)    To a prevailing nonmoving party if the court finds that a motion under this  
19               section is frivolous or solely intended to cause unnecessary delay.

20          Attorneys' fees and costs under this section may be requested by motion at any time during  
21          the course of the action but must be requested not later than 45 days after the final disposition,  
22          including, but not limited to, dismissal by the plaintiff of the action.

23          (g)    Appeals. – Notwithstanding G.S. 1A-1, Rule 54; 1-277; or 7A-27, an order granting  
24          or denying a motion to dismiss or a motion to strike under this section is subject to an immediate  
25          appeal because such order deprives the appellant of a substantial right unless there is a review  
26          before final judgment.

27          (h)    Miscellaneous. – Nothing in this section precludes the right of any party to any  
28          recovery otherwise authorized by law."

29          **SECTION 1.(b)** This section becomes effective October 1, 2021, and applies to civil  
30 actions commenced on or after that date.

31          **SECTION 2.(a)** Effective July 1, 2021, there is appropriated from the General Fund  
32 to the Administrative Office of the Courts the sum of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000)  
33 in nonrecurring funds for the 2021-2022 fiscal year to implement the provisions of this act.

34          **SECTION 2.(b)** Effective July 1, 2021, there is appropriated from the General Fund  
35 to the State Board of Elections the sum of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) in nonrecurring funds  
36 for the 2021-2022 fiscal year for the Board's activities relating to this act.

37          **SECTION 3.** Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes  
38 law.