

Senate Bill 56

By: Senators Thomas of the 54th, Unterman of the 45th, Harbison of the 15th, Hooks of the 14th, Pearson of the 51st and others

AS PASSED

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 14 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
2 hospitalization for tuberculosis, so as to revise a definition; to revise obsolete references; to
3 revise certain provisions relative to confinement of patients committed for tuberculosis
4 treatment; to revise certain provisions relative to continuation of confinement of patients
5 committed for tuberculosis treatment; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting
6 laws; and for other purposes.

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

8 **SECTION 1.**

9 Chapter 12 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to hospitalization
10 for tuberculosis, is amended by striking such chapter in its entirety and inserting in lieu
11 thereof the following:

12 "31-14-1.

13 (a) As used in this chapter, the term '~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis' means ~~tuberculosis in~~
14 ~~a form in which tubercle bacilli are being discharged whether continuously or at irregular~~
15 ~~intervals. The term shall have the same meaning as 'infectious tuberculosis' and~~
16 ~~'communicable tuberculosis.'~~ a diagnosis demonstrated by clinical, bacteriologic, or
17 diagnostic imaging evidence, or a combination thereof. Persons who have been diagnosed
18 as having active tuberculosis and have not completed a course of antituberculosis treatment
19 are still considered to have active tuberculosis and may be infectious.

20 (b) ~~Contagious~~ Active tuberculosis is declared to be dangerous to the public health.

21 31-14-2.

22 When the county board of health or the Department of Human Resources has evidence that
23 any person has ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis and is violating the rules and regulations
24 promulgated by the department or the orders issued by the county board of health and
25 thereby presents a substantial risk of exposing other persons to an imminent danger of
26 infection, after having been directed by the county board of health or the department to

1 comply with such rules, regulations, or orders, the county board of health or the department
2 shall institute proceedings by petition for commitment, returnable to the superior court of
3 the county wherein such person resides or, if such person is a nonresident or has no fixed
4 place of abode, in the county wherein such person may be found. The petition executed
5 under oath shall state the specific evidence supporting the allegations, that the evidence has
6 existed within the preceding 30 days, that the person named therein has ~~contagious~~ active
7 tuberculosis and is violating the rules and regulations of the department or the orders of the
8 county board of health and presents a substantial risk of exposing other persons to an
9 imminent danger of infection, after having been directed by the county board of health or
10 department to comply with such rules, regulations, or orders, and that the public health
11 requires commitment of the person named therein. The petition must be accompanied by
12 a certificate of a physician stating that the physician knows or suspects that the person
13 named therein may have ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis, the evidence which forms the basis
14 of this opinion, and whether a full evaluation of the person is necessary.

15 31-14-3.

16 (a) Immediately upon the filing of a petition pursuant to Code Section 31-14-2, the judge
17 of the superior court shall set the matter for a full and fair hearing on the petition. Such
18 hearing shall be held no sooner than seven days and no later than 12 days, excluding
19 Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, subsequent to the time of filing of the petition. The court
20 shall serve personal notice of the hearing upon the person named in the petition and upon
21 the petitioner. The notice required by this Code section shall include the time and place of
22 the hearing; notice of the person's right to counsel, that the person may apply for court
23 appointed counsel if the person cannot afford counsel, and that the court will appoint
24 counsel unless the person indicates in writing that he or she does not wish to be represented
25 by counsel; and notice that the person may waive his or her rights to a hearing under this
26 Code section. A copy of the petition and physician's certificate filed under Code Section
27 31-14-2 shall be attached to the notice. The judge shall, where prayed for in the petition,
28 provide for the examination of the person named therein by a physician licensed under
29 Chapter 34 of Title 43, which examination shall include sputum examinations by a
30 laboratory approved by the department and a recent chest X-ray of good diagnostic quality
31 interpreted by a physician licensed to practice under Chapter 34 of Title 43, as a part of the
32 order setting the matter for hearing; the order shall require the person or persons named
33 therein to make such examination. Any X-ray and accompanying report or any written
34 report as to a sputum examination shall be admissible as evidence without the necessity of
35 the personal testimony of the person or persons making such examination and report. A
36 physician may rely upon this evidence as the basis for the diagnosis of ~~contagious~~ active

1 tuberculosis and the defendant may offer opposing evidence on this issue by testimony or
2 otherwise. ~~A diagnosis of contagious tuberculosis does not in and of itself establish a~~
3 ~~substantial risk of exposing other persons to an imminent danger of infection.~~ All court
4 costs incurred in proceedings under this chapter, including costs of examinations required
5 by order of court but excluding any examinations procured by the person named in the
6 petition, shall be borne by the county wherein the proceedings are brought. The fee to be
7 paid to an attorney appointed under this Code section to represent a person who cannot
8 afford counsel shall be paid by the county board of health instituting proceedings for
9 commitment.

10 (b) A full and fair hearing shall mean a proceeding before a hearing examiner under Code
11 Section 31-14-8.1 or before the superior court in a proceeding under subsection (a) of this
12 Code section. The hearing may be held in a regular court room or in an informal setting,
13 in the discretion of the hearing examiner or the court, but the hearing shall be recorded
14 electronically or by a qualified court reporter. The person named as defendant shall be
15 provided with the opportunity for the assistance of counsel. If the defendant cannot afford
16 counsel, the court shall appoint counsel for the defendant or the hearing examiner shall
17 request that the court appoint such counsel; provided, however, that the defendant shall
18 have the right to refuse in writing appointment of counsel. Both parties shall have the right
19 to confront and cross-examine witnesses, to offer evidence, and to subpoena witnesses.
20 Both parties shall have the right to require testimony before the hearing examiner or in
21 court in person or by deposition from any physician upon whose evaluation the decision
22 of the hearing examiner or the court may rest. The hearing examiner and the court shall
23 apply the rules of evidence applicable in civil cases, except as otherwise provided for in
24 this chapter. The burden of proof shall be upon the party seeking commitment of the
25 defendant. The standard of proof shall be by clear and convincing evidence. At the request
26 of the defendant, the public may be excluded from the hearing. The defendant may waive
27 his or her right to be present at the hearing. The reason for the action of the court or the
28 hearing examiner in excluding the public or permitting the hearing to proceed in the
29 defendant's absence shall be reflected in the record.

30 31-14-4.

31 A copy of the petition and order shall be served on the person named in the petition. Any
32 failure of such person to comply with the order or with the notice by the persons appointed
33 therein to make examination shall be enforceable by attachment for contempt.

34

1 31-14-5.

2 Where a danger exists that the person named in the petition may abscond or conceal
3 himself or herself or where the person is conducting himself or herself so as to present a
4 substantial risk of exposing other persons to an imminent danger of infection, the court
5 may, as a part of the order made pursuant to Code Section 31-14-3, direct the sheriff or the
6 sheriff's deputies to take such person into custody pending hearing and impose such
7 confinement as will not endanger other persons. An affidavit shall be attached to the
8 petition containing the specific facts supporting the need for custody pending hearing.

9 31-14-6.

10 The person or persons appointed by the order to make the examination shall file a report
11 thereof, in triplicate, in the court wherein the proceeding is pending. The clerk of the
12 superior court shall forthwith make service of one copy on the agency instituting the
13 proceeding and one copy on the party named as defendant therein and the defendant's
14 attorney, which service shall be personal or by certified mail or statutory overnight
15 delivery.

16 31-14-7.

17 (a) Upon the hearing set in the order, if the court finds that the person has ~~contagious~~
18 active tuberculosis, is violating the rules and regulations promulgated by the department
19 or the orders issued by the county board of health after having been directed by the county
20 board of health or the department to comply with such rules, regulations, or orders, presents
21 a substantial risk of exposing other persons to an imminent danger of infection, and there
22 is no less restrictive available alternative to involuntary treatment at ~~Northwest Georgia~~
23 ~~Regional Hospital or any other hospital as may be~~ a hospital or facility approved by the
24 department for the care of tubercular patients, then the court shall issue an order
25 committing the defendant to the custody of the sheriff of the county or the sheriff's
26 deputies to be delivered to the designated hospital or facility, where the defendant shall be
27 admitted for care and treatment not to exceed ~~six months~~ two years. If the court does not
28 find that the above standards are met, then the court shall dismiss the petition and the
29 defendant shall be released from custody if taken into custody pursuant to Code Section
30 31-14-5. The costs of transporting such person to the hospital or facility shall be paid out
31 of county funds.

32 (b) An order for commitment shall be subject to review at the instance of either party by
33 appeal.

34

1 31-14-8.

2 Upon commitment the patient shall be confined in ~~the Northwest Georgia Regional~~
3 ~~Hospital or such other hospital as may be~~ a hospital or facility approved by the department
4 for the care of tubercular patients for a period not to exceed ~~six months~~ two years unless,
5 before the expiration of such ~~six-month~~ two-year period, the designated responsible
6 physician of the tuberculosis inpatient unit determines that the following conditions no
7 longer exist:

8 (1) The patient has ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis; or

9 (2) The patient has active tuberculosis and there is a substantial likelihood of future
10 noncompliance with a proposed treatment plan which will predictably lead to the
11 development of infectious drug-resistant tuberculosis. The likelihood of noncompliance
12 must be based upon a history of ~~a prior commitment followed by~~ noncompliance with
13 ~~outpatient~~ treatment; provided, however, that short emergency leaves in the event of
14 death or critical illness in the family or short therapeutic leaves may be granted under
15 conditions which would not adversely affect the public health and in accordance with
16 rules and regulations established by the department.

17 31-14-8.1.

18 (a) If it is necessary to continue confinement of a committed patient beyond a period of
19 ~~six months~~ two years ordered by a court or hearing examiner or authorized under
20 subsection (d) of this Code section, the designated responsible physician of the tuberculosis
21 inpatient unit shall review and update the patient's treatment plan and shall prepare a report
22 giving evidence of the necessity of such continued confinement. The report shall be
23 prepared so as to allow sufficient time for the hearing authorized by this Code section to
24 be conducted before the expiration of the ~~six-month~~ two-year period of confinement. The
25 report shall specify that, based upon clinical or X-ray evidence:

26 (1) The patient is a person having ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis requiring continued
27 commitment; or

28 (2) The patient is a person having active tuberculosis with a substantial likelihood of
29 future noncompliance with a proposed treatment plan which will predictably lead to the
30 development of infectious drug-resistant tuberculosis. The likelihood of noncompliance
31 must be based upon a history of ~~a prior commitment followed by~~ noncompliance with
32 ~~outpatient~~ treatment.

33 (b) Such report shall be filed in the patient's medical record. A copy of the report shall be
34 personally served on the patient along with a statement that the patient may, within 15 days
35 after service of the report, file a request for a hearing to be conducted in accordance with
36 the procedure for contested cases under Chapter 13 of Title 50, the 'Georgia Administrative

1 Procedure Act,' except as otherwise provided in this chapter, that the patient has a right to
2 counsel at the hearing, that the patient may apply immediately to the superior court in the
3 county where the committed patient is confined to have counsel appointed if the patient
4 cannot afford counsel, and that the court will appoint counsel for the patient unless the
5 patient indicates in writing that he or she does not desire to be represented by counsel or
6 has made his or her own arrangements for counsel. Payment for such court appointed
7 representation shall be made by the department. The hearing may be continued as
8 necessary to allow the appointment of counsel.

9 (c) If a hearing is requested within 15 days of service of the report on the patient, the
10 hearing examiner shall set a time and place for the hearing to be held within 15 days of the
11 time the hearing examiner receives the request. The hearing examiner may set a hearing
12 if a request is made later than 15 days after service of the report if good cause is shown for
13 the delay in making the request. Notice of the hearing shall be personally served on the
14 patient, the hospital or facility, and, when appropriate, on counsel for the patient. Such
15 hearing shall be a full and fair hearing, as described in Code Section 31-14-3, before a
16 hearing examiner. After such hearing, the hearing examiner may issue any order which the
17 court is authorized to issue under Code Section 31-14-7.

18 (d) If a hearing is not requested within 15 days of service of the report on the patient, the
19 department shall be authorized to continue confinement of the patient for an additional
20 period not to exceed six months.

21 31-14-8.2.

22 Either party may appeal any order of the superior court or hearing examiner in a proceeding
23 under this chapter. An order of the superior court may be appealed to the Court of Appeals
24 and the Supreme Court as provided by law but shall be heard as expeditiously as possible.
25 The appeal of an order of a hearing examiner shall be to the superior court of the county
26 in which the proceeding was held. The review shall be conducted by the superior court
27 without a jury and shall be confined to the record. The court, upon request, may hear oral
28 argument and receive written briefs. The patient must pay his or her costs upon filing any
29 appeal authorized under this Code section or must make an affidavit that he or she is unable
30 to pay costs. The parties shall retain all rights of review of any order of the superior court,
31 the Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court, as provided by law. The patient shall have
32 a right to counsel on appeal or, if unable to afford counsel, shall have counsel appointed
33 for the patient by the court. The appeal rights provided in this Code section are in addition
34 to any other appeal rights which the parties may have.

35

1 31-14-9.

2 (a) At any time after commitment and not more often than once every six months, the
3 patient or any friend or relative having reason to believe that the patient no longer has
4 ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis or that the patient's discharge will not endanger the public
5 health may institute proceedings by petition in the superior court of the county wherein the
6 confinement exists, whereupon the judge shall set the matter for a hearing to occur within
7 15 days requiring the person or persons to whose care the patient was committed, or their
8 duly authorized agents, to show cause on a day certain why the patient should not be
9 discharged. The judge shall also require that the patient be allowed the right to be examined
10 prior to the hearing by a licensed physician of the patient's own choice and at the patient's
11 own personal expense. Thereafter all proceedings shall be conducted in the same manner
12 as are proceedings for commitment.

13 (b) In addition to the above procedure for securing discharge, the patient or a friend or
14 relative on behalf of such person may petition, as provided by law, for a writ of habeas
15 corpus to question the cause and legality of detention and to request a court of competent
16 jurisdiction to issue a writ for release, provided that a copy of the petition along with the
17 proper certificate of service shall also be served upon the presiding judge of the court
18 ordering such detention and upon the county board of health or the Department of Human
19 Resources which initiated the petition for commitment pursuant to Code Section 31-14-2,
20 which service shall be made by certified mail or statutory overnight delivery.

21 31-14-10.

22 The county boards of health or their duly authorized agents shall, within their respective
23 limits, enforce rules and regulations adopted by the department for the protection of the
24 public against ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis.

25 31-14-11.

26 Any person who leaves a hospital or facility ~~operated~~ approved by the department for the
27 treatment of tuberculosis to which he or she has been committed by court order, without
28 having been discharged by the medical staff of the tuberculosis inpatient unit or the
29 community tuberculosis control unit, shall be taken into custody and returned thereto by
30 the sheriff of any county where such person may be found, upon affidavit being filed with
31 the sheriff by the designated responsible official of the hospital or facility to which such
32 person has been committed.

33

1 31-14-12.

2 No person having ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis who, in his or her home or other place,
3 obeys the rules and regulations of the department and county boards of health for the
4 control of ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis or who voluntarily accepts care in a hospital or
5 facility operated for the care of tuberculosis, in his or her home, or in another place and
6 who obeys the rules and regulations of the department and completes the prescribed course
7 of therapy for the control of ~~contagious~~ active tuberculosis shall be committed as
8 prescribed in this chapter.

9 31-14-13.

10 (a) In lieu of the petition for commitment as authorized by Code Section 31-14-2, the
11 county board of health or the department may petition the court for an order directing the
12 person to comply with a plan of evaluation or outpatient treatment. The department may
13 also petition the court for an order directing the parents, guardians, or custodians of persons
14 under the age of 18 who have been exposed to tuberculosis to allow screening for
15 tuberculosis by public health authorities or to provide evidence of such screening by a
16 licensed physician. Proceedings, evidence, and hearings thereon will be in the same manner
17 as with commitment petitions, and upon the hearing the court may dismiss the petition or
18 order the person to comply with the screening, evaluation, or outpatient treatment plan. The
19 court may also modify the plan prior to ordering compliance.

20 (b) A petition for outpatient treatment as authorized by subsection (a) of this Code section
21 may also be initiated by a county board of health or the department where a previously
22 hospitalized, diagnosed, or committed patient's condition no longer requires hospitalization
23 or commitment but where protection of the public health requires continued treatment on
24 an outpatient basis of said patient.

25 (c) Any person known or suspected to have tuberculosis who fails to comply with a plan
26 of evaluation or outpatient treatment ordered pursuant to this Code section, or any parent,
27 guardian, or custodian of a person under the age of 18 who fails to comply with screening
28 ordered pursuant to this Code section or who aids or abets such failure may be punished
29 as for contempt. Contempt proceedings may be initiated by the filing of a petition by the
30 county board of health or by the department with the superior court of the county of the
31 patient's residence or the county where the patient may be found if a nonresident or without
32 a fixed place of abode.

33 31-14-14.

34 Any physician, peace officer, attorney, or health official, or any hospital or facility official,
35 agent, or other person employed by a private hospital or facility or at a hospital or facility

1 operated by the state, by a political subdivision of the state, by a county board of health,
2 or by a hospital authority created pursuant to Article 4 of Chapter 7 of Title 31, who acts
3 in good faith in compliance with the admission and discharge provisions of this chapter
4 shall be immune from civil or criminal liability for his or her actions in connection with the
5 admission of a patient to or the discharge of a patient from a hospital or facility approved
6 by the department for the care of tubercular patients."

7 **SECTION 2.**

8 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.