



NEW JERSEY LAW REVISION COMMISSION

**Revised Final Report
Relating to**

Hearsay Evidence in Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings

March 19, 2020

The work of the New Jersey Law Revision Commission is only a recommendation until enacted.

Please consult the New Jersey statutes in order to determine the law of the State.

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Introduction

In the case of *New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency v. T.U.B.*¹, the Appellate Division considered the special evidentiary provision for Title 9 cases as established in N.J.S. 9:6–8.46(a)(4), which allows the admission of certain hearsay statements by children about allegations of abuse or neglect. That provision is broader than the ordinary Evidence Rule 803(c)(27) STATEMENTS BY A CHILD RELATING TO A SEXUAL OFFENSE.² The issue was whether the provision applies in Title 30 cases involving the termination of parental rights.

In the *T.U.B.* case, while recognizing that the provision had been applied to Title 30 actions in prior cases, the Appellate Division found that it applied only in Title 9 cases. Title 9 governs findings of child abuse or neglect that can lead to custody orders; Title 30 actions can result in permanent termination of parental rights.

In response to that opinion, the Legislature enacted the following:

AN ACT concerning child abuse and neglect and supplementing P.L.1951, c.138 (C.30:4C-1 et seq.).

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

C.30:4C-15.1a Certain prior statements of child, admissible as evidence.

1. a. Previous statements made by a child relating to any allegations of abuse or neglect of that child shall be admissible in evidence in any hearing: to terminate parental rights pursuant to section 15 of P.L.1951, c.138 (C.30:4C-15); to provide judicial review and approval of a permanency plan pursuant to section 26 of P.L.1999, c.53 (C.30:4C-11.4); to determine care and supervision or custody pursuant to section 12 of P.L.1951, c.138 (C.30:4C-12); for guardianship pursuant to section 8 of P.L.1991, c.275 (C.30:4C-15.2); to determine placement pursuant to section 5 of P.L.1977, c.424 (C.30:4C-54); or in any other hearing that may be held during the course of child placement, permanency, or guardianship proceedings, or during the course of proceedings to terminate parental rights, pursuant to chapter 4C of Title 30 of the Revised Statutes.

¹ *New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency v. T.U.B.*, 450 N.J. Super. 210 (App. Div. 2017).

² **803(c)(27) STATEMENTS BY A CHILD RELATING TO A SEXUAL OFFENSE.** A statement by a child under the age of 12 relating to sexual misconduct committed with or against that child is admissible in a criminal, juvenile, or civil proceeding if (a) the proponent of the statement makes known to the adverse party an intention to offer the statement and the particulars of the statement at such time as to provide the adverse party with a fair opportunity to prepare to meet it; (b) the court finds, in a hearing conducted pursuant to Rule 104(a), that on the basis of the time, content and circumstances of the statement there is a probability that the statement is trustworthy; and (c) either (i) the child testifies at the proceeding, or (ii) the child is unavailable as a witness and there is offered admissible evidence corroborating the act of sexual abuse; provided that no child whose statement is to be offered in evidence pursuant to this rule shall be disqualified to be a witness in such proceeding by virtue of the requirements of Rule 601.

b. No such statement, if uncorroborated, shall be sufficient to make a determination that termination of parental rights is in the best interests of the child, or to make a fact finding of abuse or neglect.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 21, 2020.

In its 2014 Final Report relating to Title 9 Child Abuse and Neglect, the Law Revision Commission included the provision interpreted in *New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency v. T.U.B* without substantive change.³ The opening language of that provision is, “In any hearing under this chapter.” The chapter in question is chapter 27 which applies to actions relating to child abuse and neglect and child in need of services, not to termination of parental rights, which is the subject of chapter 30.

As the result of the enactment of N.J.S. 30:4C-15, the Commission reconsidered whether the special evidentiary rules should apply only to child abuse and neglect proceedings or to termination of parental rights proceedings as well. The Commission decided that it was compelled to follow the recent Legislative enactment. As a result, the Commission recommends amendment of section 9:27-26 of its 2014 Report.

In addition, cases have held that the special rule (3) relating to business records is substantively identical to the to the ordinary business record exception in the rules of evidence, N.J.R.E. 803(c)(6).⁴ As applied to child abuse and neglect proceedings, that identity is further supported by Court Rule 5:12-4(d) which applies specifically to reports of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency.⁵ The Rule is applicable to termination of parental rights cases as well as proceedings to establish child abuse or neglect. The standard for admission of evidence is the same under all three provisions.⁶ To make that judicial interpretation clear, the Commission recommends replacing the bulk of special rule (3) with a reference to the applicable Rule of Evidence.

Proposed Amendment

The proposed amendment to the Commission’s 2014 Report is:

³ NJLRC Final Report relating to Title 9 Child Abuse and Neglect, p. 21 Section 9:27-26. Evidence

⁴ See, e.g. *DYFS v. M.C. III*, 201 N.J. 328, 346-347 (2010).

⁵ (d) Reports. The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (the "Division") shall be permitted to submit into evidence, pursuant to N.J.R.E. [803\(c\)\(6\)](#) and [801\(d\)](#), reports by staff personnel or professional consultants. Conclusions drawn from the facts stated therein shall be treated as prima facie evidence, subject to rebuttal.

⁶ *DYFS v. M.C. III*, *supra*.

9:27-26. Evidence

a. In any hearing under this ~~chapter act~~, including an administrative hearing held in accordance with the "Administrative Procedure Act,"

(1) proof of the abuse or neglect of one child shall be admissible evidence on the issue of the abuse or neglect of any other child of, or the responsibility of, the parent or other custodian;

(2) proof that injuries sustained by a child or that the condition of a child is of such a nature as would ordinarily not be sustained or exist except by reason of the acts or omissions of the parent or other custodian shall be evidence that a child is an abused or neglected child; and

(3) any writing, record or photograph, whether in the form of an entry in a book or otherwise, made as a memorandum or record of any condition, act, transaction, occurrence or event relating to a child in an abuse or neglect or child in need of services proceeding of any hospital or any other public or private institution or agency shall be admissible in evidence as provided in the Rules of Evidence including N.J.R.E. 803 9c)(6) ~~in proof of that condition, act, transaction, occurrence or event, if the judge finds that it was made in the regular course of the business of any hospital or any other public or private institution or agency, and that it was in the regular course of such business to make it, at the time of the condition, act, transaction, occurrence or event, or within a reasonable time thereafter, shall be evidence of the facts contained in the certification. A certification by someone other than the head of the hospital or agency shall be accompanied by a photocopy of a delegation of authority signed by both the head of the hospital or agency and by such other employees. All other circumstances of the making of the memorandum, record or photograph, including lack of personal knowledge of the making, may be proved to affect its weight, but they shall not affect its admissibility and~~

(4) previous statements made by the child relating to any allegations of abuse or neglect shall be admissible in evidence; provided, however, that no such statement, if uncorroborated, shall be sufficient to make a fact finding of abuse or neglect.

b. In a fact-finding hearing (1) any determination that the child was abused or neglected or is in need of services must be based on a preponderance of the evidence and (2) only competent, material and relevant evidence may be admitted.

c. In a dispositional hearing and during all other stages of a proceeding under this act, only material and relevant evidence may be admitted.⁷

⁷ NJLRC Final Report relating to Title 9 Child Abuse and Neglect, p. 21 Section 9:27-26. Evidence