WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 5520

By Delegates Hillenbrand, Kelly, Steele, Ward, Thorne, Akers, and Garcia

[Introduced February 8, 2024; Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary]

A BILL to amend and reenact §49-4-727, §49-4-729, and §49-4-733 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, all relating to juvenile competency; repealing the presumption of competence of a child 14 years of age or older; repealing the presumption of incompetence of a child under the age of 14 years; and clarifying that a juvenile under the age of 14 years may not be detained in certain circumstances.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 4. COURT ACTIONS.

§49-4-727. Juvenile competency proceedings.

(a) ~~Subject to the provisions of subsection (c) of this section, a~~ A juvenile’s attorney, the prosecuting attorney, or the court may raise the issue of his or her competency to participate in the proceeding any time during proceedings under this article. Once competency is raised, all proceedings unrelated to competency shall be stayed until the issue of competency is resolved. ~~A juvenile presumed incompetent under subsection (c) of this section shall not be adjudicated unless the presumption of incompetency has been rebutted as provided in subsections (b) and (c) of this section.~~

~~(b) In any delinquency proceeding pursuant to this article, a juvenile 14 years or older is presumed to be competent. A juvenile has the burden of proof to rebut this presumption by showing incompetency by a preponderance of the evidence.~~

~~(c) In any delinquency proceeding pursuant to this article, if the juvenile is under 14 years of age, there exists a rebuttable presumption that he or she is incompetent to proceed beyond the stage of the proceeding resolving the issue of competency, unless judicially determined to be competent pursuant to the procedures set forth in §49-4-728 through §49-4-734 of this code. The state has the burden of proof to rebut this presumption by showing competency by a preponderance of the evidence~~

~~(d)~~(b) ~~Regardless of the age of the juvenile, the~~ The court may dismiss the petition without ordering a competency evaluation or competency hearing if the prosecuting attorney, the juvenile’s attorney, and the guardian ad litem, if previously appointed, agree that there is compelling evidence that the juvenile is not competent to participate in the proceedings: *Provided*, That a court may not order services authorized by §49-4-733 of this code without a competency evaluation.

~~(e)~~(c) If ~~and when~~ the issue of a juvenile’s competency is raised under subsection (a) of this section, ~~or, a rebuttable presumption of incompetency exists under subsection (c) of this section~~ the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem for the juvenile. The Supreme Court of Appeals is requested to establish a training program for persons acting as guardians ad litem in juvenile competency matters.

§49-4-729. Motion for determination of competency, time frames, order for evaluation.

(a) When the prosecuting attorney, the juvenile’s attorney, or the guardian ad litem has reasonable basis to believe that~~:~~

~~(1) A~~ a juvenile ~~age 14 or older~~ is incompetent to proceed in the delinquency action, that party shall file a motion for a determination of competency. The motion shall state any known facts to the movant of in support thereof. If the court raises the issue sua sponte, it shall, by written order, set forth the basis for ordering a competency evaluation.

~~(2) A juvenile under the age of 14 is competent to proceed in the delinquency action, the prosecuting attorney shall file a motion for determination of competency. The motion shall state the basis to believe the juvenile is competent to proceed despite the presumption of incompetency due to age and shall state any known facts to the prosecuting attorney in support of the motion. If the court raises the issue sua sponte, the court by written order shall set forth the factual basis supporting the finding that the juvenile is competent to proceed~~

(b) Within 10 judicial days after a motion is made, the court shall make one of the following determinations: ~~regardless of which presumption applies~~

(1) Find that there is compelling evidence that the juvenile is not competent to participate in the proceedings and dismiss the case pursuant to §49-4-727~~(d)~~(b) of this code;

(2) Without conducting a hearing, find that there exists a reasonable basis to conduct a competency evaluation; or

(3) Schedule a hearing to determine whether there exists a reasonable basis to conduct a competency evaluation. The hearing shall be held within 30 judicial days. The court’s determination shall be announced no later than three judicial days after the conclusion of the hearing.

(c) If the court determines there is a reasonable basis to order a competency evaluation pursuant to §49-4-731 of this code, or if the prosecutor and the juvenile’s attorney agree to the evaluation, the court shall order a competency evaluation. If the court orders a competency evaluation, the court shall order that the competency evaluation be conducted in the least restrictive environment, taking into account the public safety and the best interests of the juvenile.

(1) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this code, the court shall provide in its order that the qualified forensic evaluator shall have access to all relevant confidential and public records related to the juvenile, including competency evaluations and reports conducted in prior delinquent proceedings. The court shall provide to the qualified forensic evaluator a copy of the petition and the names and contact information for the judge, prosecutor, juvenile’s attorney, and parents or legal guardians.

(2) Within five judicial days after the court orders an evaluation, the prosecutor shall deliver to the evaluator copies of relevant police reports and other background information relevant to the juvenile that are in the prosecutor’s possession.

(3) Within five judicial days after the court orders an evaluation, the juvenile’s attorney shall deliver to the qualified forensic evaluator copies of police reports and other records including, but not limited to, educational, medical, psychological, and neurological records that are relevant to the evaluation and that are in the attorney’s possession. Upon good cause shown, the court may extend the time frame to deliver these documents noting that time is of the essence.

§49-4-733. Procedure after determination of juvenile’s competency to participate in the proceedings.

(a) After a hearing pursuant to §49-4-732 of this code, if the court determines by a preponderance of the evidence that the juvenile is competent to proceed ~~despite any presumption that may have applied~~, the delinquency proceedings shall resume as provided by law.

(b) If the court determines by a preponderance of the evidence that a juvenile is incompetent to proceed, but is likely to attain competency within a reasonable time with services, the court shall stay the proceedings and order the juvenile to receive services designated to assist the juvenile in attaining competency, based upon the recommendations in the competency evaluation report, unless the court makes specific findings that the recommended services are not justified. The court shall order the juvenile’s parent or legal guardian to contact a court-designated provider by a specified date to arrange for services.

(1) The competency attainment services provided to a juvenile shall be based on the recommendations contained in the qualified forensic evaluator’s report described in §49-4-731(d) of this code, and are subject to the conditions and time periods required pursuant to this section measured from the date the court approves the plan.

(2) The court shall order that the competency attainment services ordered are provided in the least restrictive environment, taking into account the public safety and the best interests of the juvenile. If the juvenile has been released on temporary orders and refuses or fails to cooperate with the service provider, the court may modify the orders to require a more appropriate setting for further services. A juvenile may not be placed in a Bureau of Juvenile Services facility to receive competency attainment services. Additionally, a juvenile ~~presumed incompetent under §49-4-727(c) of this code~~ under 14 years of age shall not be placed in a Bureau of Juvenile Services facility, except in compliance with §49-4-705 and §49-4-706 of this code, and corresponding Rules of Juvenile Procedure as adopted by the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia.

(3) A juvenile shall not be required to participate in competency attainment services for longer than is necessary to attain competency or after the court determines that there is no reasonable likelihood that competency can be attained. The following maximum time limits apply to the participation of a juvenile:

(A) A juvenile charged with an act which would constitute a misdemeanor or nonviolent felony if committed by an adult shall not be required to participate in competency attainment services beyond his or her 19th birthday and there shall be a rebuttable presumption that competency is not attainable if the juvenile has not attained competency after 90 days of services.

(B) A juvenile charged with an act which would constitute a felony crime of violence if committed by an adult shall not be required to participate in competency attainment services beyond his or her 21st birthday and there shall be a rebuttable presumption that competency is not attainable if the juvenile has not attained competency after 180 days of services.

(4) Not later than 10 judicial days after the court orders competency attainment services, the department shall identify the appropriate entity and location to provide those services.

(5) Within 10 judicial days after the department identifies the appropriate entity and location, the provider responsible for the juvenile’s competency attainment services shall commence. The court shall deliver to that provider:

(A) The name and address of the juvenile’s counsel;

(B) A copy of the juvenile’s petition;

(C) A copy of the competency evaluation report;

(D) The name, address, and phone number of the juvenile’s parents or legal guardian;

(E) The name of the department’s caseworker, if any; and

(F) Any other relevant documents or reports concerning the juvenile’s health that have come to the attention of the court.

(c) The court shall order and conduct review hearings no less often than every 90 days as determined appropriate by the court. The multidisciplinary team shall meet prior to any review hearing and provide a written status report to the court prior to the hearing. Unless sooner ordered by the court, the qualified forensic evaluator shall submit a report to the court prior to any review hearing, and upon completion or termination of services, and shall include the following:

(1) The services provided to the juvenile, including medication, education, and counseling;

(2) The likelihood that the competency of the juvenile to proceed will be restored within the applicable period of time set forth in subdivision (3), subsection (b) of this section; and

(3) The progress made toward the goals and objectives for the restoration of competency identified in the recommendations from the competency evaluation adopted by the court.

(d) The provider responsible for the juvenile’s competency attainment services shall report to the court within three judicial days if he or she determines that:

(1) The juvenile is failing to cooperate, and the lack of cooperation is significantly impeding or precluding the attainment of competency; or

(2) The current setting is no longer the least restrictive setting that is consistent with the juvenile’s ability to attain competency taking into account public safety and the best interests of the juvenile. The provider shall include in the report an assessment of the danger the juvenile poses to himself, herself or others and an assessment of the appropriateness of the placement.

(e) The provider responsible for the juvenile’s competency attainment services shall request a subsequent evaluation when the provider has reason to believe:

(1) The juvenile has achieved the goals of the plan and would be able to understand the nature and objectives of the proceedings against him or her, to assist in his or her defense, and to understand and appreciate the consequences that may be imposed or result from the proceedings with or without reasonable accommodations; and

(2) The juvenile will not achieve the goals of the plan within the applicable period of time pursuant to subdivision (3), subsection (b) of this section.

(f) The evaluator shall assess the observation of the provider and provide a written report to the court within 10 days of receiving a report from the provider pursuant to subsection (e) of this section.

(g) The court shall provide copies of any report made by the provider to the prosecuting attorney, the juvenile’s attorney, the juvenile’s case worker, and the juvenile’s guardian ad litem, if any. The court shall provide copies of any reports made by the provider to the juvenile’s parents or legal guardians, unless the court finds that doing so is not in the best interest of the juvenile.

(h) Within 15 judicial days after receiving an evaluator’s report, the court may hold a hearing to determine if new, additional, or further orders are necessary.

(i) If the court determines that the juvenile is not making progress toward competency or is so uncooperative that attainment services cannot be effective, the court may order a change in setting or services that would help the juvenile attain competency within the relevant period of time as set forth in subdivision (3), subsection (b) of this section.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to clarify competency proceedings for juvenile delinquency court actions.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.