

New Guide Addresses Issues Related to Pregnant or Parenting Minors

The circumstances of youngsters under eighteen years of age who are about to be parents, or already are, raise interesting questions in several legal areas, including provision of social services. As a group, these young women (nearly all single, under-age, custodial parents are female) can benefit from considerable help from their local department of social services (DSS). Even a young woman who is mature, bright, and competent for her age usually lacks some of the resources she needs, now or for the future—sufficient income and education, housing, transportation, health care, employment, child care, and child support, among others. For these clients, their parents, their children, and possibly their partners, DSS is a crucial source of assistance.

A recent Institute of Government (IOG) publication, *Social Services for Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents*, addresses some of the legal issues related to social services. For example:

- Can parents put a pregnant minor child out of their home?
- What are a pregnant or parenting adolescent's rights to attend school or community college, or to work?
- Are minors responsible for their child's support? If not, who is?
- Must minors live with their parents to be eligible for cash assistance?
- Does a young mother in foster care have a right to have her child with her? Must she surrender custody to do so?

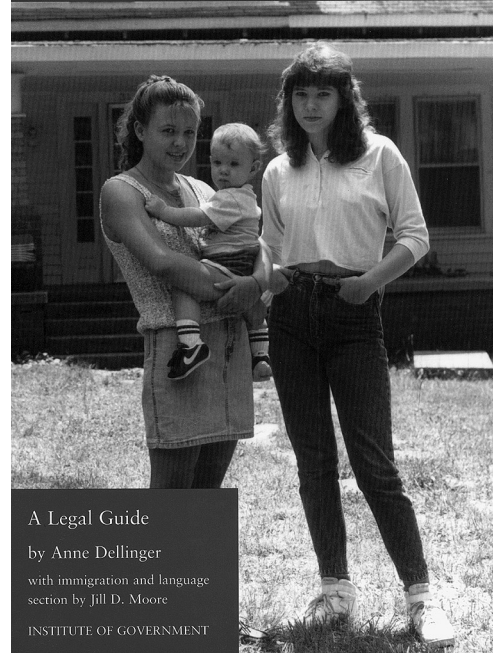
- Who consents to adoption, health care, and other matters for a minor's child?
- If DSS staff learn that a minor has been subjected to statutory rape, must they report the crime to a law enforcement agency?

The last question illustrates well the complexity of the issues discussed in the IOG guide. Section 7B-307(a) of the North Carolina General Statutes requires a DSS director to contact a law enforcement agency within forty-eight hours if he or she learns of a possible crime that may have physically harmed a minor. Does that mean a DSS director must report intercourse involving a 13-, 14-, or 15-year-old who apparently consented? Such an act is a crime if the other partner is at least four years older than the minor. But can intercourse that is not known to have been physically coerced do *physical* harm? Yes. Pregnancy is a possible outcome, and it has more-than-minimal medical risks, particularly for very young women. Transmission of disease, including HIV infection, is another possible outcome.

In addition, DSS directors probably cannot know, especially within forty-eight hours, whether a minor's sexual activity constitutes statutory rape alone or results from greater coercion. Until a court rules on the matter, DSS directors might be prudent to share their information with a law enforcement agency.

With financial support from IOG and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation,

Social Services for Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents



A Legal Guide

by Anne Dellinger
with immigration and language
section by Jill D. Moore
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

DSS staff, attorneys, and others have received the IOG guide without charge. It is the second in a series of five guides that are planned on the subject of pregnant and parenting minors. The text of the guide and that of an earlier book for health providers can be read and printed from www.adolescentpregnancy.unc.edu. For more information about the series, contact Anne Dellinger, telephone (919) 966-4168, e-mail dellinger@iogmail.iog.unc.edu.

Training on Relationships between Nonprofits and Governments

In March 2003 the Project to Strengthen Nonprofit-Government Relationships will again offer the training session Navigating Nonprofit-Government Relationships. For the first time, nonprofit staff are encouraged to attend. Only government staff participated in previous sessions.

It's "a wonderful idea to bring nonprofits and government together," one nonprofit liaison said. "This provides each entity with an opportunity to understand the dynamics of the other's work."

This will be the third offering of the training session, which focuses on interactions between city or county governments and community-based nonprofits. The decision to include nonprofit staff came at the encouragement of local government participants from previous sessions.

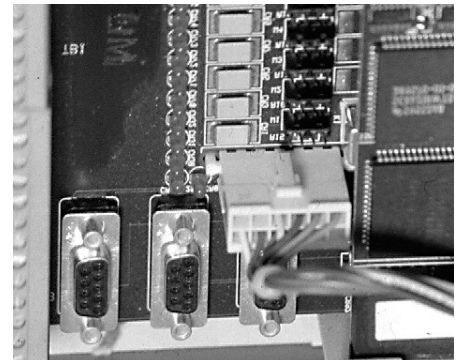
School of Government staff organizing the training include Gordon Whitaker, Margaret Henderson, and Lydian Altman-Sauer. Other trainers will be Gita Gulati-Partee from the NC Center for Nonprofits and Frayda Bluestein and Anita Brown-Graham from the School of Government.

The training will be held in Asheville on March 6–7, 2003. Participation will be limited to 40 people. For more information, contact Margaret Henderson, telephone (919) 966-3455, e-mail mhenderson@iogmail.iog.unc.edu.

Team Formed to Disseminate Best Practices in IT Security

In the last few years, many local governments have implemented information technology (IT) solutions to take advantage of the Internet—for example, systems for customers to pay utility bills or request services, or for employees at remote locations to communicate with city hall or the courthouse. Yet according to the Electronic Government 2002 survey of the International City/County Management Association, 55% of the local governments responding to the survey have no Web-site security policies or procedures in place, and 67% of the respondents say they have not changed their IT security practices since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In many cases the lack of security or the low level of awareness is due to limited training and resources in the local government.

To boost training and enhance resources, members of the North Carolina Local Government Information Systems Association, staff of the Institute of Government's Center for Public Technology, and faculty of the UNC–Charlotte College of Information Technology have created a Security Best Practices Team.



Over the next few months, the team will identify areas in which local governments' IT systems are vulnerable to intruders, develop instruments to assess the degree of vulnerability, and create tools for cities and counties to use in hardening their networks and servers against intruders. The team then will assist jurisdictions that need help making their systems more secure.

For more information, contact Tom Foss, technical assistance manager with the Center for Public Technology, telephone (828) 322-1331, e-mail foss@iogmail.iog.unc.edu.



Beginning with this issue of *Popular Government*, the Institute of Government will publish three issues per year instead of four. The seasons of publication will be fall, winter, and spring/summer. Unfortunately we will have to maintain this cutback as long as the state's budget problems persist. We hope that *PG* will continue to provide readers with timely and informative articles about matters of interest to them. —Editor

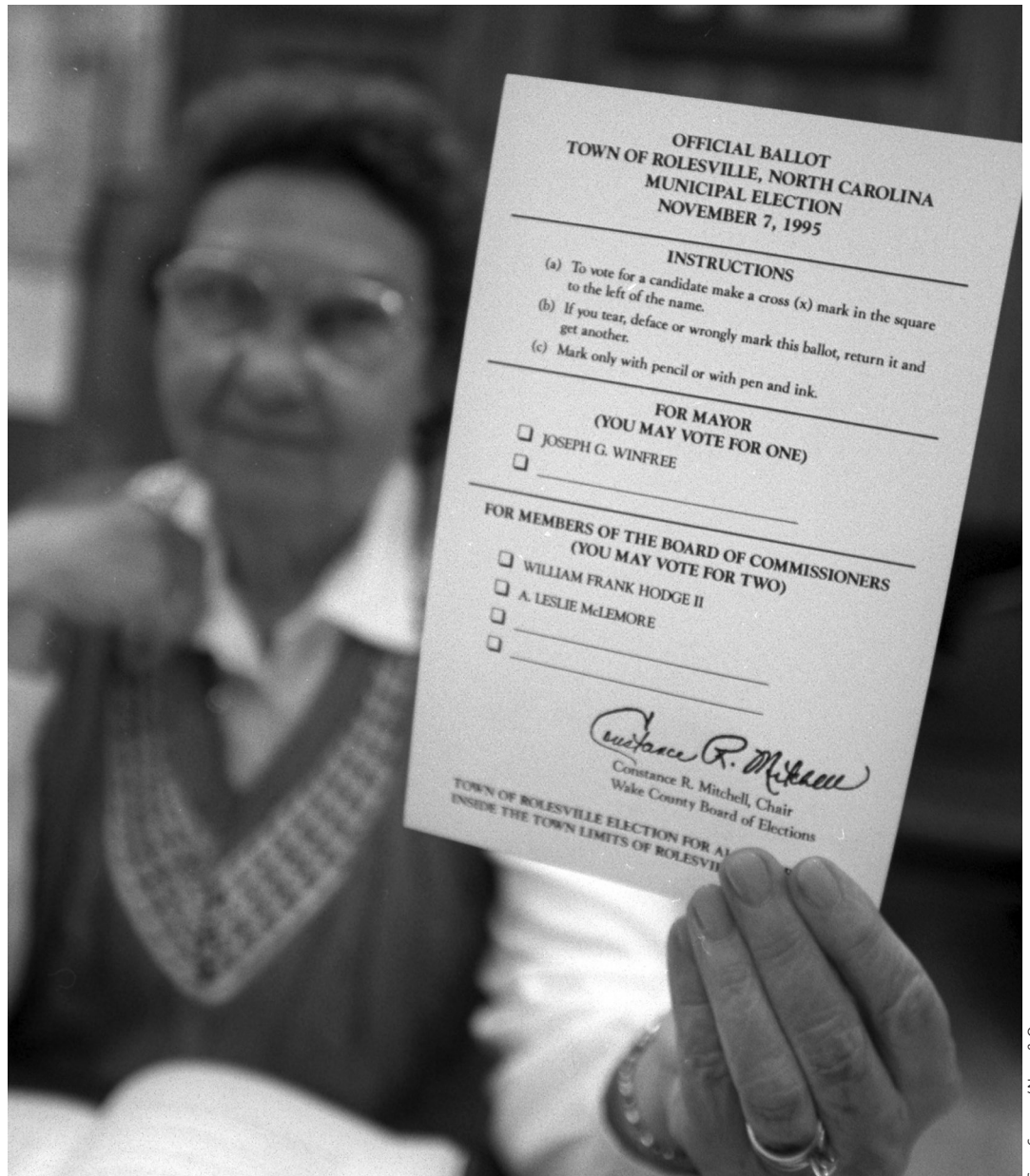
North Carolina in 2000 was way ahead of Florida in administrative structure of elections, in recount and protest practices, in procedures for ballot design and approval, in maintenance of voter lists and allowing of access to the polls, in handling of absentee ballots, and in the capacity to provide the immediate guidance that election officials needed.



NEWS & OBSERVER

Above right: The validity of absentee ballots became an issue in the 2000 election in Florida.

Right: To cut costs in the primary election, a North Carolina polling place used old-fashioned paper ballots.



CHRIS SEWARD / NEWS & OBSERVER