

§ 15A-2005. Mentally retarded defendants; death sentence prohibited.

(a) (1) The following definitions apply in this section:

- a. Mentally retarded. – Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with significant limitations in adaptive functioning, both of which were manifested before the age of 18.
- b. Significant limitations in adaptive functioning. – Significant limitations in two or more of the following adaptive skill areas: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure skills and work skills.
- c. Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning. – An intelligence quotient of 70 or below.

(2) The defendant has the burden of proving significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, significant limitations in adaptive functioning, and that mental retardation was manifested before the age of 18. An intelligence quotient of 70 or below on an individually administered, scientifically recognized standardized intelligence quotient test administered by a licensed psychiatrist or psychologist is evidence of significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning; however, it is not sufficient, without evidence of significant limitations in adaptive functioning and without evidence of manifestation before the age of 18, to establish that the defendant is mentally retarded.

(b) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, no defendant who is mentally retarded shall be sentenced to death.

(c) Upon motion of the defendant, supported by appropriate affidavits, the court may order a pretrial hearing to determine if the defendant is mentally retarded. The court shall order such a hearing with the consent of the State. The defendant has the burden of production and persuasion to demonstrate mental retardation by clear and convincing evidence. If the court determines the defendant to be mentally retarded, the court shall declare the case noncapital, and the State may not seek the death penalty against the defendant.

(d) The pretrial determination of the court shall not preclude the defendant from raising any legal defense during the trial.

(e) If the court does not find the defendant to be mentally retarded in the pretrial proceeding, upon the introduction of evidence of the defendant's mental retardation during the sentencing hearing, the court shall submit a special issue to the jury as to whether the defendant is mentally retarded as defined in this section. This special issue shall be considered and answered by the jury prior to the consideration of aggravating or mitigating factors and the determination of sentence. If the jury determines the defendant to be mentally retarded, the court shall declare the case noncapital and the defendant shall be sentenced to life imprisonment.

(f) The defendant has the burden of production and persuasion to demonstrate mental retardation to the jury by a preponderance of the evidence.

(g) If the jury determines that the defendant is not mentally retarded as defined by this section, the jury may consider any evidence of mental retardation presented during the sentencing hearing when determining aggravating or mitigating factors and the defendant's sentence.

(h) The provisions of this section do not preclude the sentencing of a mentally retarded offender to any other sentence authorized by G.S. 14-17 for the crime of murder in the first degree. (2001-346, s. 1.)