

CONTRACTS--ISSUE OF FORMATION--DEFENSE OF UNDUE INFLUENCE.

The (state number) issue reads:

"Did the defendant enter into the contract with the plaintiff as a result of undue influence?"¹

(You will answer this issue only if you have answered the (state number)² issue "Yes" in favor of the plaintiff.)

On this issue the burden of proof is on the defendant.³ This means that the defendant must prove, by the greater weight of the evidence, that the defendant entered into the contract with the plaintiff as a result of undue influence.

Undue influence occurs when a person's professed act is not his own, but is in fact the act of the person exerting the

¹See *Caudill v. Smith*, 117 N.C. App. 64, 66, 450 S.E.2d 8, 10 (1994), disc. rev. denied, 339 N.C. 610, 452 S.E.2d 247 (1995) (applying undue influence factors to execution of a deed). In *Caudill*, the Court of Appeals noted that the trial court's use of a modified form of N.C.P.I. 505.30 ("Rescission Of Written Instrument--Undue Influence") was acceptable, but the Court also suggested that a charge listing the factors of undue influence the jury may consider would have been better. *Id.*; see also *Stephenson v. Warren*, 136 N.C. App. 768, 525 S.E.2d 809, disc. rev. denied, 351 N.C. 646, 543 S.E.2d 883 (2000) (listing the most common factors that bear on consideration of undue influence).

²See N.C.P.I.--Civil 501.01 (Contracts--Issue of Formation).

³*Caudill*, 117 N.C. App. at 66, 450 S.E.2d at 10. However, in those cases in which a fiduciary relationship is found to exist, the burden of proof shifts to the transferee. *McNeill v. McNeill*, 223 N.C. 178, 181, 25 S.E.2d 615, 617 (1943); *Lee v. Pearce*, 68 N.C. 76, 81 (1873). A fiduciary relationship exists where "there has been a special confidence reposed in one who in equity and good conscience is bound to act in good faith and with due regard to the interests of the one reposing confidence." *Curl v. Key*, 311 N.C. 259, 264, 316 S.E.2d 272, 275 (1984). "Where a transferee of property stands in a confidential or fiduciary relationship to the transferor, it is the duty of the transferee to exercise the utmost good faith in the transaction and to disclose to the transferor all material facts relating thereto and his failure to do [so] constitutes fraud. . . ." *Id.*

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influence.⁴ Influence is undue when it causes a person to enter into a contract when he would not otherwise have done so.⁵ The undue influence must act upon the free will of a person at the time he enters into a contract.⁶

The existence of undue influence is for you to determine from all the facts and circumstances in evidence. You may consider, together with all the other relevant facts and circumstances, the following:⁷ the defendant's

[age]

[physical condition]

[mental condition]

[[dependence upon] [association with] [relationship with]

[custody by] (*state name of person exerting influence*)]

⁴*Hardee v. Hardee*, 309 N.C. 753, 756, 309 S.E.2d 243, 245 (1983) ("a party must show that something operated upon the mind of the person [that] had a controlling effect sufficient to destroy the person's free agency and to render the instrument not properly an expression of the person's wishes, but rather the expression of the wishes of another or other"); see also *In re Will of Turnage*, 208 N.C. 130, 131, 179 S.E. 332, 333 (1935).

⁵*Id.*

⁶*Id.*

⁷Although there is "no test by which the sufficiency of the evidence of undue influence can be measured by mathematical certainty," these factors have been properly used at trial. *Caudill*, 117 N.C. App. at 66, 450 S.E.2d at 10; see also *In re Will of Andrews*, 299 N.C. 52, 54-55, 261 S.E.2d 198, 200 (1980) ("The very nature of undue influence makes it impossible for the law to lay down tests to determine its existence with mathematical certainty.").

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[opportunity to [associate] [have a relationship] with
persons other than (*state name of person exerting influence*)]

[relationship (by blood) to the other parties to the
transaction]

[the degree to which the defendant was influenced to enter
into the contract by (*state name of person exerting influence*)]

[(*state any other relevant factors supported by the
evidence*)]

(Undue influence does not necessarily involve a bad or
improper motive).⁸

(Mere persuasion, without more, is not undue influence. A
person may use fair argument and persuasion to induce another to
enter into a contract in his favor.)⁹

(Influence gained by kindness and affection, without more, is
not undue, even if it induces a person to enter into a contract
that is unwise.)¹⁰

Finally, as to the (*state number*) issue on which the
defendant has the burden of proof, if you find by the greater

⁸*In re Will of Turnage*, 208 N.C. at 132, 179 S.E. at 333.

⁹*Willetts v. Willetts*, 254 N.C. 136, 118 S.E.2d 548 (1961); *In re
Cravens's Will*, 169 N.C. 561, 570, 86 S.E. 587, 592 (1915).

¹⁰*Willetts*, 254 N.C. at 137, 118 S.E.2d at 549.

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weight of the evidence that the defendant entered into the contract with the plaintiff as a result of undue influence, then it would be your duty to answer this issue "Yes" in favor of the defendant.

If, on the other hand, you fail to so find, then it would be your duty to answer this issue "No" in favor of the plaintiff.