

§ 50-5.1. Grounds for absolute divorce in cases of incurable insanity.

In all cases where a husband and wife have lived separate and apart for three consecutive years, without cohabitation, and are still so living separate and apart by reason of the incurable insanity of one of them, the court may grant a decree of absolute divorce upon the petition of the sane spouse: Provided, if the insane spouse has been released on a trial basis to the custody of his or her respective spouse such shall not be considered as terminating the status of living "separate and apart" nor shall it be considered as constituting "cohabitation" for the purpose of this section nor shall it prevent the granting of a divorce as provided by this section. Provided further, the evidence shall show that the insane spouse is suffering from incurable insanity, and has been confined or examined for three consecutive years next preceding the bringing of the action in an institution for the care and treatment of the mentally disordered or, if not so confined, has been examined at least three years preceding the institution of the action for divorce and then found to be incurably insane as hereinafter provided. Provided further, that proof of incurable insanity be supported by the testimony of two reputable physicians, one of whom shall be a staff member or the superintendent of the institution where the insane spouse is confined, and one regularly practicing physician in the community wherein such husband and wife reside, who has no connection with the institution in which said insane spouse is confined; and provided further that a sworn statement signed by said staff member or said superintendent of the institution wherein the insane spouse is confined or was examined shall be admissible as evidence of the facts and opinions therein stated as to the mental status of said insane spouse and as to whether or not said insane spouse is suffering from incurable insanity, or the parties according to the laws governing depositions may take the deposition of said staff member or superintendent of the institution wherein the insane spouse is confined; and provided further that incurable insanity may be proved by the testimony of one or more licensed physicians who are members of the staff of one of this State's accredited four-year medical schools or a state-supported mental institution, supported by the testimony of one or more other physicians licensed by the State of North Carolina, that each of them examined the allegedly incurable insane spouse at least three years preceding the institution of the action for divorce and then determined that said spouse was suffering from incurable insanity and that one or more of them examined the allegedly insane spouse subsequent to the institution of the action and that in his or their opinion the said allegedly insane spouse was continuously incurably insane throughout the full period of three years prior to the institution of the said action.

In lieu of proof of incurable insanity and confinement for three consecutive years next preceding the bringing of the action in an institution for the care and treatment of the mentally disordered prescribed in the preceding paragraph, it shall be sufficient if the evidence shall show that the allegedly insane spouse was adjudicated to be insane more than three years preceding the institution of the action for divorce, that such insanity has continued without interruption since such adjudication and that such person has not been adjudicated to be sane since such adjudication of insanity; provided, further, proof of incurable insanity existing after the institution of the action for divorce shall be furnished by the testimony of two reputable, regularly practicing physicians, one of whom shall be a psychiatrist.

In lieu of proof of incurable insanity and confinement for three consecutive years next preceding the bringing of the action in an institution for the care and treatment of the mentally disordered, or the adjudication of insanity, as prescribed in the preceding paragraphs, it shall be sufficient if the evidence shall show that the insane spouse was examined by two or more members of the staff of one of this State's accredited four-year medical schools, both of whom are medical doctors, at least three years preceding the institution of the action for divorce with a determination at that time by said staff members that said spouse is suffering from incurable insanity, that such insanity has continued without interruption since such determination;

provided, further, that sworn statements signed by the staff members of the accredited medical school who examined the insane spouse at least three years preceding the commencement of the action shall be admissible as evidence of the facts and opinions therein stated as to the mental status of said insane spouse as to whether or not said insane spouse was suffering from incurable insanity; provided, further, that proof of incurable insanity under this section existing after the institution of the action for divorce shall be furnished by the testimony of two reputable physicians, one of whom shall be a psychiatrist on the staff of one of the State's accredited four-year medical schools, and one a physician practicing regularly in the community wherein such insane person resides.

In all decrees granted under this subdivision in actions in which the insane defendant has insufficient income and property to provide for his or her own care and maintenance, the court shall require the plaintiff to provide for the care and maintenance of the insane defendant for the defendant's lifetime, based upon the standards set out in G.S. 50-16.5(a). The trial court will retain jurisdiction of the parties and the cause, from term to term, for the purpose of making such orders as equity may require to enforce the provisions of the decree requiring plaintiff to furnish the necessary funds for such care and maintenance.

Service of process shall be held upon the regular guardian for said defendant spouse, if any, and if no regular guardian, upon a duly appointed guardian ad litem and also upon the superintendent or physician in charge of the institution wherein the insane spouse is confined. Such guardian or guardian ad litem shall make an investigation of the circumstances and notify the next of kin of the insane spouse or the superintendent of the institution of the action and whenever practical confer with said next of kin before filing appropriate pleadings in behalf of the defendant.

In all actions brought under this subdivision, if the jury finds as a fact that the plaintiff has been guilty of such conduct as has conducted to the unsoundness of mind of the insane defendant, the relief prayed for shall be denied.

The plaintiff or defendant must have resided in this State for six months next preceding institution of any action under this section. (1945, c. 755; 1949, c. 264, s. 5; 1953, c. 1087; 1955, c. 887, s. 15; 1963, c. 1173; 1971, c. 1173, ss. 1, 2; 1975, c. 771; 1977, c. 501, s. 1; 1983, c. 613, s. 1.)