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IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF NORTH CAROLINA

No. COA25-490

Filed 16 September 2026

Iredell County, Nos. 24JA000232-480, 24JA000233-480, 24JA000234-480

IN RE: Z.G., J.G., T.G.

Appeal by respondent-mother from orders entered 11 February 2025 by Judge Courtney S. Marlowe in Iredell County District Court. Heard in the Court of Appeals 12 March 2026.

Jason R. Page for respondent-appellant mother.

Lauren Vaughan for petitioner-appellee Iredell County Department of Social Services.

Administrative Office of the Courts, by Brittany T. McKinney, for the guardian ad litem.

GORE, Judge.

Respondent-mother appeals from orders adjudicating her minor children “Zachary,” “John,” and “Tom”¹ as abused and neglected juveniles and placing the children with their maternal grandparents. After careful review, we affirm.

I. Background

¹ Pseudonyms.

This appeal concerns three juveniles: Tom, born September 2018; John, born February 2020; and Zachary, born January 2024.

On 18 December 2024, Iredell County Department of Social Services (“DSS”) filed petitions alleging the children were abused and neglected. The petitions alleged that Zachary was taken to Lake Norman Regional Medical Center on 5 November 2024, where he tested positive for amphetamines and methamphetamines, and that all three children later tested positive for controlled substances through hair-follicle testing. The parents provided no explanation for the children’s exposure.

The matter came on for adjudication on 11 February 2025. At the hearing, DSS sought release of subpoenaed medical and testing records so the parties could review them during the lunch recess. Mother moved to continue the hearing to allow additional review and possible expert consultation; the trial court denied the motion. Mother renewed her motion when the hearing resumed, and the trial court again denied it.

During the recess, the children’s father signed a consent order stipulating to the petition allegations. Following receipt of the documentary evidence and testimony from a Child Protective Services investigator, the trial court entered an order adjudicating the children abused and neglected.

Both parents subsequently stipulated to a disposition placing the children with their maternal grandparents. Mother timely appealed.

II. Analysis

Mother argues: (1) the trial court abused its discretion in denying her motion to continue; (2) several findings of fact are unsupported by clear and convincing evidence; and (3) the findings do not support the conclusions of law adjudicating abuse and neglect.

A. Motion to Continue

We review denial of a motion to continue for abuse of discretion when no constitutional issue is raised. *In re D.J.*, 378 N.C. 565, 569 (2021). Abuse of discretion exists where the ruling is manifestly unsupported by reason. *In re A.L.S.*, 374 N.C. 515, 516–17 (2020).

Juvenile adjudication hearings must generally occur within sixty days of the filing of the petition. N.C.G.S. § 7B-801(c). Continuances are disfavored and are permitted only for good cause or extraordinary circumstances. N.C.G.S. § 7B-803; *In re J.E.*, 377 N.C. 285, 291 (2021).

Mother argues she lacked sufficient time to review medical records introduced at the hearing and was therefore prejudiced by denial of a continuance. We disagree.

Mother received the petitions more than one month before the hearing, and the petitions specifically referenced Zachary’s hospitalization and the children’s positive drug screens. The record also reflects that subpoena notices for the medical and testing records were served on all parties well before the adjudication hearing. At the hearing, DSS sought release of the records so the parties could review them prior to continuing testimony.

The trial court found that the parties received notice of the subpoenas and accompanying custodian affidavits. Nothing in the record shows mother was prevented from obtaining or reviewing these records earlier, and the court reasonably concluded extraordinary circumstances did not justify delay beyond the statutory timeframe.

Accordingly, the trial court did not abuse its discretion by denying mother's motion to continue.

B. Findings of Fact

We review whether the trial court's "findings are supported by clear, cogent, and convincing evidence." *In re K.S.*, 380 N.C. 60, 64 (2022).

Mother challenges Findings of Fact 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9.

1. Business Records Exception

Mother contends the medical and testing records were improperly admitted under Rule 803(6).

Records kept in the ordinary course of business, including hospital records, are admissible under the business-records exception when properly authenticated. N.C.G.S. § 8C-1, Rule 803(6); *State v. Miller*, 80 N.C. App. 425, 428 (1986). Authentication may be established through a custodian affidavit when advance notice is provided. *In re S.W.*, 175 N.C. App. 719, 725 (2006); Rule 803(6).

Here, DSS issued subpoenas to the medical providers and provided copies to all parties before the hearing. The subpoenas included instructions regarding

affidavit authentication, and records custodians submitted affidavits attesting the records were true copies maintained in the ordinary course of business.

The trial court therefore did not err in admitting the records.

2. *Father's Stipulation*

Mother argues the court improperly relied on the father's adjudication stipulation. A stipulation by one parent does not bind another parent who objects. *In re T.C.*, 919 S.E.2d 513, 519 (N.C. Ct. App. 2025).

The record here does not show the trial court relied on the father's stipulation in making its findings. Mother's argument lacks merit.

3. *Challenged Findings*

a. Finding 4

Finding 4 concerns Zachary's hospitalization and positive urine drug screen. The finding is supported by properly admitted medical records documenting his symptoms, test results, and transfer for observation, as well as testimony from the DSS investigator.

b. Finding 5

Finding 5 addresses hair-follicle testing showing positive results for methamphetamine and amphetamine. Those results are reflected in the admitted toxicology reports and corroborated by testimony.

c. Finding 7

Finding 7 incorporates DSS's written report. The investigator adopted the

relevant portions of the report under oath, and the statements are supported by the medical and testing records.

d. Finding 8

Finding 8 reflects standard language indicating that a parent's consent is not an admission for criminal purposes. The finding does not attribute consent to mother and presents no reversible issue.

e. Finding 9

Finding 9 states it would be contrary to the juveniles' interests to return home and that DSS made reasonable efforts to prevent removal.

Although mother points to evidence favorable to her—including negative drug screens and participation in visitation—the existence of contrary evidence does not undermine findings supported by clear and convincing evidence. *In re Helms*, 127 N.C. App. 505, 511 (1997).

The positive drug results for all three children support the finding that for them to return home would be contrary to their welfare. *See In re K.H.*, 281 N.C. App. 259, 269 (2022). Testimony also supported the court's finding that DSS implemented measures aimed at preventing removal.

C. Conclusions of Law

We review conclusions of law de novo. *In re I.K.*, 377 N.C. 417, 421 (2021).

1. Neglect

A neglected juvenile includes a child who lives in an environment injurious to

the child's welfare. N.C.G.S. § 7B-101(15). Evidence that a child tested positive for methamphetamine supports a finding that the child resided in an injurious environment. *In re K.H.*, 281 N.C. App. at 269.

Because the findings establish that all three children tested positive for controlled substances, the adjudication of neglect is supported.

2. Abuse

An abused juvenile includes one whose parent inflicts or allows a substantial risk of serious physical injury by other than accidental means. N.C.G.S. § 7B-101(1).

North Carolina cases recognize that serious injury or substantial risk may arise through medical neglect or exposure to dangerous conditions, not solely physical violence. *See In re A.D.W.*, 298 N.C. App. 515 (2025).

Here, the findings establish that Zachary presented with symptoms consistent with drug exposure and tested positive for amphetamines and methamphetamines, and that his siblings also tested positive. The parents did not provide an explanation for the exposure. The evidence further showed that both parents had histories of substance abuse and pending drug-related charges.

Where children sustain serious or unexplained harm while in a parent's care, findings may support an inference that the parent allowed a substantial risk of injury. *See In re K.B.*, 253 N.C. App. 423, 434–35 (2017). The trial court's findings support its conclusion that the juveniles were abused.

Because we affirm the adjudications, mother's argument that the disposition

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order must be vacated upon reversal of the adjudication orders is without merit.

III. Conclusion

The trial court did not abuse its discretion in denying the motion to continue, and clear and convincing evidence supports the challenged findings of fact. Those findings support the conclusions that the juveniles are neglected and abused. We therefore affirm the adjudication and disposition orders.

AFFIRMED.

Judges MURRY and FREEMAN concur.

Report per Rule 30(e).