

Judicial Proof

CHAPTER 595

WITNESSES

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NOTE: For rules of civil procedure, district court, see Volume 9.

595.01 WITNESS.

A witness is a person whose declaration under oath is received as evidence for any purpose, whether such declaration is made on oral examination, or by deposition or affidavit.

History: (9808) *RL s 4654*

595.02 TESTIMONY OF WITNESSES.

Subdivision 1. Competency of witnesses. Every person of sufficient understanding, including a party, may testify in any action or proceeding, civil or criminal, in court or before any person who has authority to receive evidence, except as provided in this subdivision:

(a) A husband cannot be examined for or against his wife without her consent, nor a wife for or against her husband without his consent, nor can either, during the marriage or afterwards, without the consent of the other, be examined as to any communication made by one to the other during the marriage. This exception does not apply to a civil action or proceeding by one against the other, nor to a criminal action or proceeding for a crime committed by one against the other or against a child of either, nor to a criminal action or proceeding in which one is charged with homicide or an attempt to commit homicide and the date of the marriage of the defendant is subsequent to the date of the offense, nor to an action or proceeding for nonsupport, neglect, dependency, or termination of parental rights.

(b) An attorney cannot, without the consent of the attorney's client, be examined as to any communication made by the client to the attorney or the attorney's advice given thereon in the course of professional duty; nor can any employee of the attorney be examined as to the communication or advice, without the client's consent.

(c) A member of the clergy or other minister of any religion shall not, without the consent of the party making the confession, be allowed to disclose a confession made to the member of the clergy or other minister in a professional character, in the course of discipline enjoined by the rules or practice of the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other minister belongs; nor shall a member of the clergy or other minister of any religion be examined as to any communication made to the member of the clergy or other minister by any person seeking religious or spiritual advice, aid, or comfort or advice given thereon in the course of the member of the clergy's or other minister's professional character, without the consent of the person.

(d) A licensed physician or surgeon, dentist, or chiropractor shall not, without the consent of the patient, be allowed to disclose any information or any opinion based thereon which the professional acquired in attending the patient in a professional capacity, and which was necessary to enable the professional to act in that capacity;

after the decease of the patient, in an action to recover insurance benefits, where the insurance has been in existence two years or more, the beneficiaries shall be deemed to be the personal representatives of the deceased person for the purpose of waiving this privilege, and no oral or written waiver of the privilege shall have any binding force or effect except when made upon the trial or examination where the evidence is offered or received.

(e) A public officer shall not be allowed to disclose communications made to the officer in official confidence when the public interest would suffer by the disclosure.

(f) Persons of unsound mind, persons intoxicated at the time of their production for examination, and children under ten years of age, if any of them lack capacity to remember or to relate truthfully facts respecting which they are examined, are not competent witnesses. A child describing any act of sexual contact or penetration performed on or with the child by another may use language appropriate for a child of that age.

(g) A registered nurse, psychologist or consulting psychologist shall not, without the consent of the professional's client, be allowed to disclose any information or opinion based thereon which the professional has acquired in attending the client in a professional capacity, and which was necessary to enable the professional to act in that capacity.

(h) An interpreter for a person handicapped in communication shall not, without the consent of the person, be allowed to disclose any communication if the communication would, if the interpreter were not present, be privileged. For purposes of this section, a "person handicapped in communication" means a person who, because of a hearing, speech or other communication disorder, or because of the inability to speak or comprehend the English language, is unable to understand the proceedings in which the person is required to participate. The presence of an interpreter as an aid to communication does not destroy an otherwise existing privilege.

(i) A parent or the parent's minor child may not be examined as to any communication made in confidence by the minor to the minor's parent. A communication is confidential if made out of the presence of persons not members of the child's immediate family living in the same household. This exception may be waived by express consent to disclosure by a parent entitled to claim the privilege or by the child who made the communication, or by failure of the child or parent to object when the contents of a communication are demanded. This exception does not apply to a civil action or proceeding by one spouse against the other or by a parent or child against the other, nor to a proceeding to commit either the child or parent to whom the communication was made or to place the person or property or either under the control of another because of an alleged mental or physical condition, nor to a criminal action or proceeding in which the parent is charged with a crime committed against the person or property of the communicating child, the parent's spouse, or a child of either the parent or the parent's spouse, or in which a child is charged with a crime or act of delinquency committed against the person or property of a parent or a child of a parent, nor to an action or proceeding for termination of parental rights, nor any other action or proceeding on a petition alleging child abuse, child neglect, abandonment or nonsupport by a parent.

(j) Sexual assault counselors may not be compelled to testify about any opinion or information received from or about the victim without the consent of the victim. However, a counselor may be compelled to identify or disclose information in investigations or proceedings related to neglect or termination of parental rights if the court determines good cause exists. In determining whether to compel disclosure, the court shall weigh the public interest and need for disclosure against the effect on the victim, the treatment relationship, and the treatment services if disclosure occurs. Nothing in this clause exempts sexual assault counselors from compliance with the provisions of sections 626.556 and 626.557.

"Sexual assault counselor" for the purpose of this section means a person who has undergone at least 40 hours of crisis counseling training and works under the direction

of a supervisor in a crisis center, whose primary purpose is to render advice, counseling or assistance to victims of sexual assault.

(k) A person cannot be examined as to any communication or document, including worknotes, made or used in the course of or because of mediation pursuant to an agreement to mediate. This does not apply to the parties in the dispute in an application to a court by a party to have a mediated settlement agreement set aside or reformed. A communication or document otherwise not privileged does not become privileged because of this paragraph. This paragraph is not intended to limit the privilege accorded to communication during mediation by the common law.

Subd. 2. Exceptions. (a) The exception provided by paragraphs (d) and (g) of subdivision 1 shall not apply to any testimony, records, or other evidence relating to the abuse or neglect of a minor in any proceeding under chapter 260 or any proceeding under section 245.801, to revoke a day care or foster care license, arising out of the neglect or physical or sexual abuse of a minor, as defined in section 626.556, subdivision 2.

(b) The exception provided by paragraphs (d) and (g) of subdivision 1 shall not apply to criminal proceedings arising out of the neglect or physical or sexual abuse of a minor, as defined in section 626.556, subdivision 2, if the court finds that:

(1) there is a reasonable likelihood that the records in question will disclose material information or evidence of substantial value in connection with the investigation or prosecution; and

(2) there is no other practicable way of obtaining the information or evidence. This clause shall not be construed to prohibit disclosure of the patient record when it supports the otherwise uncorroborated statements of any material fact by a minor alleged to have been abused or neglected by the patient; and

(3) the actual or potential injury to the patient-health professional relationship in the treatment program affected, and the actual or potential harm to the ability of the program to attract and retain patients, is outweighed by the public interest in authorizing the disclosure sought.

No records may be disclosed under this paragraph other than the records of the specific patient suspected of the neglect or abuse of a minor. Disclosure and dissemination of any information from a patient record shall be limited under the terms of the order to assure that no information will be disclosed unnecessarily and that dissemination will be no wider than necessary for purposes of the investigation or prosecution.

Subd. 3. Certain out-of-court statements admissible. An out-of-court statement made by a child under the age of ten years or a person who is mentally impaired as defined in section 609.341, subdivision 6, alleging, explaining, denying, or describing any act of sexual contact or penetration performed with or on the child or any act of physical abuse of the child or the person who is mentally impaired by another, not otherwise admissible by statute or rule of evidence, is admissible as substantive evidence if:

(a) the court or person authorized to receive evidence finds, in a hearing conducted outside of the presence of the jury, that the time, content, and circumstances of the statement and the reliability of the person to whom the statement is made provide sufficient indicia of reliability; and

(b) the child or person mentally impaired as defined in section 609.341, subdivision 6, either:

(i) testifies at the proceedings; or

(ii) is unavailable as a witness and there is corroborative evidence of the act; and

(c) the proponent of the statement notifies the adverse party of the proponent's intention to offer the statement and the particulars of the statement sufficiently in advance of the proceeding at which the proponent intends to offer the statement into evidence to provide the adverse party with a fair opportunity to prepare to meet the statement.

For purposes of this subdivision, an out-of-court statement includes video, audio, or other recorded statements. An unavailable witness includes an incompetent witness.

Subd. 4. Court order. (a) In a proceeding in which a child less than ten years of age is alleging, denying, or describing an act of physical abuse or an act of sexual contact or penetration performed with or on the child by another, the court may, upon its own motion or upon the motion of any party, order that the testimony of the child be taken in a room other than the courtroom or in the courtroom and televised at the same time by closed-circuit equipment, or recorded for later showing to be viewed by the jury in the proceeding.

(b) At the taking of testimony under this subdivision, only the judge, the attorneys for the defendant and for the state, any person whose presence would contribute to the welfare and well-being of the child, and persons necessary to operate the recording or closed-circuit equipment may be present with the child during the child's testimony.

(c) The court shall permit the defendant to observe and hear the testimony of the child in person. If the court, upon its own motion or the motion of any party, determines that the presence of the defendant during testimony taken pursuant to this subdivision would psychologically traumatize the witness so as to render the witness unavailable to testify, the court may order that the testimony be taken in a manner that:

(1) the defendant can see and hear the testimony of the child in person and communicate with counsel, but the child cannot see or hear the defendant; or

(2) the defendant and child can view each other by video or television monitor from separate rooms.

Subd. 5. Waiver of privilege for health care providers. A party who commences an action for malpractice, error, mistake, or failure to cure, whether based on contract or tort, against a health care provider on the person's own behalf or in a representative capacity, waives in that action any privilege existing under subdivision 1, paragraphs (d) and (g), as to any information or opinion in the possession of a health care provider who has examined or cared for the party or other person whose health or medical condition has been placed in controversy in the action. This waiver must permit all parties to the action, and their attorneys or authorized representatives, to informally discuss the information or opinion with the health care provider if the provider consents. Prior to an informal discussion with a health care provider, the defendant must mail written notice to the other party at least 15 days before the discussion. The plaintiff's attorney or authorized representative must have the opportunity to be present at any informal discussion. Appropriate medical authorizations permitting discussion must be provided by the party commencing the action upon request from any other party.

A health care provider may refuse to consent to the discussion but, in that event, the party seeking the information or opinion may take the deposition of the health care provider with respect to that information and opinion, without obtaining a prior court order.

For purposes of this subdivision, "health care provider" means a physician, surgeon, dentist, or other health care professional or hospital, including all persons or entities providing health care as defined in section 145.61, subdivisions 2 and 4, or a certified health care professional employed by or providing services as an independent contractor in a hospital.

History: (9814) *RL s 4660; 1919 c 513 s 1; 1931 c 206 s 1; 1967 c 640 s 1; 1969 c 1010 s 1; 1973 c 79 s 1; 1973 c 685 s 13; 1978 c 519 s 1; 1981 c 131 s 3; 1981 c 262 s 1; 1981 c 273 s 3; 1Sp1981 c 4 art 4 s 8; 1982 c 558 s 3; 1984 c 588 s 4; 1984 c 646 s 8; 1985 c 24 s 2; 1985 c 286 s 13; 1986 c 361 s 3,4; 1986 c 444; 1986 c 455 s 84*

595.021 NEWS MEDIA; PROTECTION OF SOURCES; CITATION.

Sections 595.021 to 595.025 may be cited as the Minnesota free flow of information act.

History: 1973 c 735 s 1; 1Sp1981 c 4 art 1 s 181

595.022 PUBLIC POLICY.

In order to protect the public interest and the free flow of information, the news media should have the benefit of a substantial privilege not to reveal sources of information or to disclose unpublished information. To this end, the freedom of press requires protection of the confidential relationship between the news gatherer and the source of information. The purpose of sections 595.021 to 595.025 is to insure and perpetuate, consistent with the public interest, the confidential relationship between the news media and its sources.

History: 1973 c 735 s 2; 1Sp1981 c 4 art 1 s 182

595.023 DISCLOSURE PROHIBITED.

No person who is or has been directly engaged in the gathering, procuring, compiling, editing, or publishing of information for the purpose of transmission, dissemination or publication to the public shall be required by any court, grand jury, agency, department or branch of the state, or any of its political subdivisions or other public body, or by either house of the legislature or any committee, officer, member, or employee thereof, to disclose in any proceeding the person or means from or through which information was obtained, or to disclose any unpublished information procured by the person in the course of work or any of the person's notes, memoranda, recording tapes, film or other reportorial data which would tend to identify the person or means through which the information was obtained.

History: 1973 c 735 s 3; 1986 c 444

595.024 EXCEPTION AND PROCEDURE.

Subdivision 1. A person seeking disclosure may apply to the district court of the county where the person employed by or associated with a news media resides, has a principal place of business or where the proceeding in which the information sought is pending.

Subd. 2. The application shall be granted only if the court determines after hearing the parties that the person making application, by clear and convincing evidence, has met all three of the following conditions:

- (1) that there is probable cause to believe that the source has information clearly relevant to a specific violation of the law other than a misdemeanor,
- (2) that the information cannot be obtained by any alternative means or remedy less destructive of first amendment rights, and
- (3) that there is a compelling and overriding interest requiring the disclosure of the information where the disclosure is necessary to prevent injustice.

Subd. 3. **Determination; appeal.** The district court shall consider the nature of the proceedings, the merits of the claims and defenses, the adequacies of alternative remedies, the relevancy of the information sought, and the possibility of establishing by other means that which the source is expected or may tend to prove. The court shall make its appropriate order after making findings of fact. The order may be appealed directly to the court of appeals according to the rules of appellate procedure. The order is stayed and nondisclosure shall remain in full force and effect during the pendency of the appeal.

History: 1973 c 735 s 4; 1983 c 247 s 204; 1986 c 444

595.025 DEFAMATION.

Subdivision 1. The prohibition of disclosure provided in section 595.023 shall not apply in any defamation action where the person seeking disclosure can demonstrate that the identity of the source will lead to relevant evidence on the issue of actual malice.

Subd. 2. Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision 1, the identity of the source of information shall not be ordered disclosed unless the following conditions are met:

(a) that there is probable cause to believe that the source has information clearly relevant to the issue of defamation;

(b) that the information cannot be obtained by any alternative means or remedy less destructive of first amendment rights.

Subd. 3. Determination; appeal. The court shall make its order on the issue of disclosure after making findings of fact, which order may be appealed to the court of appeals according to the rules of appellate procedure. During the appeal the order is stayed and nondisclosure shall remain in full force and effect.

History: 1973 c 735 s 5; 1983 c 247 s 205

595.03 [Repealed, 1974 c 394 s 12]

595.04 CONVERSATION WITH DECEASED OR INSANE PERSON.

It shall not be competent for any party to an action, or any person interested in the event thereof, to give evidence therein of or concerning any conversation with, or admission of, a deceased or insane party or person relative to any matter at issue between the parties, unless the testimony of such deceased or insane person concerning such conversation or admission, given before death or insanity, has been preserved and can be produced in evidence by the opposite party, and then only in respect to the conversation or admission to which such testimony relates.

History: (9817) RL s 4663; 1986 c 444

595.05 [Repealed, 1974 c 394 s 11]

595.06 CAPACITY OF WITNESS.

When an infant, or a person apparently of weak intellect, is produced as a witness, the court may examine the infant or witness to ascertain capacity, and whether the person understands the nature and obligations of an oath, and the court may inquire of any person what peculiar ceremonies the person deems most obligatory in taking an oath.

History: (9819) RL s 4665; 1986 c 444

595.07 CONVICT AS WITNESS.

Every person convicted of crime shall be a competent witness in any civil or criminal proceeding, but the conviction may be proved for the purpose of affecting the weight of the testimony, either by the record or by the convicted person's cross-examination, upon which the convicted person shall answer any proper question relevant to that inquiry; and the party cross-examining shall not be concluded by the convicted person's answer thereto.

History: (9948) RL s 4780; 1986 c 444

595.08 COMMITTAL OF WITNESS; DETENTION OF DOCUMENTS.

When it shall appear probable to a court of record, having general jurisdiction, that a person who has testified in an action or proceeding before it has committed perjury in any testimony so given, it may, by order or process for that purpose, immediately commit the person to prison, or take a recognizance for the person's appearance to answer to an indictment for perjury. In such case, if the court shall deem that any paper or document produced by either party is necessary to be used in the prosecution for perjury, it may detain the same, and direct it to be delivered to the county attorney.

History: (10021) RL s 4836; 1986 c 444