

NORTH CAROLINA COURT OF APPEALS

In re: J.E.S., P.K.S., P.E.S.

No. COA25-855 · No. COA25-855 · Decided June 3, 2026

SUMMARY

The North Carolina Court of Appeals affirmed an Orange County permanency planning order ceasing reunification efforts and orders terminating the respondent mother’s parental rights to three children. The court held that competent evidence supported the trial court’s findings and conclusions regarding the likelihood of future neglect and the cessation of reunification efforts.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	North Carolina Court of Appeals
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Judge Allegra Collins; Judge Wood; Judge Flood
JURISDICTION	North Carolina Court of Appeals
DECIDED	June 3, 2026
DOCKET	COA25-855
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Respondent Mother appealed from a permanency planning order ceasing reunification efforts and from orders terminating her parental rights to three children.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For an order ceasing reunification efforts, the court reviews whether the trial court made appropriate findings, whether those findings are supported by credible evidence, whether the findings support the conclusions, and whether the trial court abused its discretion as to disposition. Findings of fact are conclusive if supported by any competent evidence; conclusions of law are reviewed de novo; and an abuse of discretion occurs when the ruling is so arbitrary that it could not have resulted from a reasoned decision. In a termination-of-parental-rights proceeding, the court reviews only findings necessary to support the determination that grounds existed; unchallenged findings are binding on appeal, and conclusions of law are reviewed de novo.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published

PARTIES

Respondent Mother v. Orange County Department of Social Services,
Guardian ad Litem

TOPICS

termination of parental rights

parental rights

family law procedure

standard of review

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

family law

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termination of parental rights

child welfare

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court's findings of fact in the permanency planning order were supported by competent evidence and supported the decision to cease reunification efforts.
2. Whether the trial court properly found that reunification efforts would be unsuccessful or inconsistent with the children's health or safety and adopted adoption as the primary permanency plan.
3. Whether competent evidence supported termination of Mother's parental rights on the ground of neglect, including a likelihood that neglect would recur or continue if the children were returned to her care.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court did not err in ceasing reunification efforts because the challenged findings were supported by competent evidence and the findings supported the determination that reunification efforts would be unsuccessful or inconsistent with the children's health or safety.
2. The trial court properly terminated Mother's parental rights to all three children on the ground of neglect because competent evidence supported the findings and the unchallenged findings established a likelihood that neglect would recur or continue if the children were returned to Mother's care.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Reunification shall be the primary or secondary plan unless, . . . the court makes written findings that reunification efforts clearly would be unsuccessful or would be inconsistent with the juvenile’s health or safety.” (at 5)

“Even assuming arguendo that the challenged findings are unsupported, the trial court’s unchallenged findings of fact support its conclusion that there is a likelihood of future neglect of Josh, Prince, and Paul.” (at 10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Mother had an extensive history with child protective services, including prior terminations of parental rights and a felony conviction arising from the nonaccidental death of another child. After the three children involved in this appeal came into DSS custody, evidence showed inadequate supervision, unsafe transportation, marijuana exposure, and serious injuries to the twins in a motor-vehicle accident while they were improperly restrained or unrestrained. Evaluations diagnosed Mother with several mental-health disorders, borderline intellectual

functioning, and parenting limitations requiring fully supervised contact. Although Mother completed some services, she failed to complete medication-management and psychiatric-evaluation components of her case plan and continued to exhibit insufficient insight and unsafe parenting behavior.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Orange County Department of Social Services obtained custody of the three children in November 2023 after filing juvenile petitions. The trial court entered a permanency planning order in June 2024 ceasing reunification efforts and establishing adoption as the primary plan. After a June 2025 bench trial, the trial court terminated Mother's parental rights on grounds including neglect. The North Carolina Court of Appeals affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- In re C.M., 273 N.C. App. 427, 429 (2020)
- In re J.H., 373 N.C. 264, 267 (2020)
- In re M.R.D.C., 166 N.C. App. 693, 697 (2004)
- In re A.P.W., 378 N.C. 405, 410 (2021)
- In re T.N.H., 372 N.C. 403, 407 (2019)
- In re C.B.C., 373 N.C. 16, 19 (2019)
- In re X.I.F., 297 N.C. App. 799, 810 (2025)