

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to victims of Florida reform school
3 abuse; providing a short title; providing a
4 definition; authorizing certain persons to apply to
5 the Department of Juvenile Justice for certification
6 as victims of Florida reform school abuse; providing
7 application requirements; providing for determination
8 of eligibility; requiring the department to submit a
9 list of certified victims to the Legislature by a
10 specified date; providing an effective date.

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12 WHEREAS, the Florida State Reform School, also known as the
13 "Florida Industrial School for Boys," the "Florida School for
14 Boys," the "Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys," and the "Dozier
15 School," was opened by the State of Florida in 1900 in Marianna
16 to house children who had committed minor criminal offenses such
17 as incorrigibility, truancy, and smoking, as well as serious
18 criminal offenses such as theft and murder, and

19 WHEREAS, throughout the Dozier School's history, reports of
20 abuse, suspicious deaths, and threats of closure plagued the
21 school, and

22 WHEREAS, many former students of the Dozier School have
23 sworn under oath that they were beaten at a facility located on
24 the school grounds known as the "White House," and

25 WHEREAS, a psychologist employed at the Dozier School

26 testified under oath at a 1958 United States Senate Judiciary
27 Committee hearing that boys at the school were beaten by an
28 administrator, that the blows were severe and dealt with a great
29 deal of force with a full arm swing over the head and down, that
30 a leather strap approximately 10 inches long was used, and that
31 the beatings constituted "brutality," and

32 WHEREAS, a former Dozier School employee stated in
33 interviews with law enforcement that, in 1962, several employees
34 of the school were removed from the facility based upon
35 allegations that they made sexual advances toward boys at the
36 facility, and

37 WHEREAS, a forensic investigation funded by the Legislature
38 and conducted from 2013 to 2016 by the University of South
39 Florida found incomplete records regarding deaths and 45 burials
40 that occurred at the Dozier School between 1900 and 1960 and
41 discovered that families were often notified of a child's death
42 after he or she was buried or denied access to the child's
43 remains at the time of burial, and

44 WHEREAS, the excavations conducted as part of the forensic
45 investigation revealed more burials than were reported in
46 official records, and

47 WHEREAS, in 1955, the State of Florida opened a new reform
48 school in Okeechobee called the Florida School for Boys at
49 Okeechobee, also known as the "Okeechobee School," to address
50 overcrowding at the Dozier School, and staff of the Dozier

51 School were transferred to the Okeechobee School, where similar
 52 abusive practices were implemented, and

53 WHEREAS, many former students of the Okeechobee School have
 54 sworn under oath that they were beaten at a facility located on
 55 the school grounds known as the "Adjustment Unit," and

56 WHEREAS, more than 500 former students of the Dozier School
 57 and the Okeechobee School have come forward with reports of
 58 physical, mental, and sexual abuse by school staff during the
 59 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, resulting in trauma that has endured
 60 throughout their lives, and

61 WHEREAS, during the 2017 Regular Legislative Session, the
 62 Legislature unanimously issued a formal apology to the victims
 63 of abuse with the passage of CS/SR 1440 and CS/HR 1335,
 64 expressing regret for the treatment of boys who were sent to the
 65 Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys and the Florida School for Boys
 66 at Okeechobee; acknowledging that the treatment was cruel,
 67 unjust, and a violation of human decency; and expressing its
 68 commitment to ensure that children who have been placed in the
 69 State of Florida's care are protected from abuse and violations
 70 of human decency, NOW, THEREFORE,

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72 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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74 Section 1. Short title.—This act shall be known as the
 75 "Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys and Florida School for Boys at

76 Okeechobee Abuse Victim Certification Act."

77 Section 2. Definition.—As used in this act, the term
78 "victim of Florida reform school abuse" means a living person
79 who was confined at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys or the
80 Florida School for Boys at Okeechobee between 1940 and 1975 and
81 was subjected to physical or sexual abuse perpetrated by
82 personnel of the school during the period of confinement.

83 Section 3. Application for certification as victim of
84 Florida reform school abuse; determination of eligibility.—

85 (1) A person may submit an application to the Department
86 of Juvenile Justice for certification as a victim of Florida
87 reform school abuse. The estate of a decedent or a personal
88 representative of a decedent may not submit an application on
89 behalf of the decedent. Such application must be submitted by
90 October 1, 2018, and must include:

91 (a) An affidavit stating that the applicant was confined
92 at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys or the Florida School
93 for Boys at Okeechobee, the beginning and ending dates of
94 confinement, and that the applicant was subjected to physical or
95 sexual abuse perpetrated by personnel of the school during the
96 period of confinement.

97 (b) Documentation from the State of Florida, the Arthur G.
98 Dozier School for Boys, or the Florida School for Boys at
99 Okeechobee which confirms that the applicant was confined
100 between 1940 and 1975.

101 (c) Positive proof of the applicant's identity, including
102 a current form of photographic identification.

103 (2) (a) Within 30 calendar days after receipt of an
104 application, the department shall notify the applicant of any
105 errors or omissions and request any additional information
106 relevant to the review of the application. The applicant shall
107 have 15 calendar days after such notification to correct any
108 errors or omissions and submit any additional information
109 requested by the department in order to complete the
110 application.

111 (b) The department shall process and review each completed
112 application within 90 calendar days after receipt. The
113 department shall determine upon review whether the application
114 meets the requirements of this section and shall notify the
115 applicant of its determination within 5 business days.

116 (c) The department may not deny an application for failure
117 of the applicant to correct an error or omission or submit
118 additional information unless the department timely notified the
119 applicant of such error or omission or requested such additional
120 information as provided in paragraph (a).

121 (3) The department shall certify a person whose
122 application meets the requirements of this section as a victim
123 of Florida reform school abuse. By March 1, 2019, the department
124 shall submit a list of all certified victims to the President of
125 the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

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Section 4. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.