

By the Committee on Judiciary; and Senator Rouson

590-03413-17

20171440c1

Senate Resolution

A resolution acknowledging the abuses experienced by children confined in the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys and the Florida School for Boys at Okeechobee and expressing the Senate's regret for such abuses and its commitment to ensure that the children of this state are protected from the abuses and violations of fundamental human decency.

WHEREAS, the Florida State Reform School, also called the Florida Industrial School for Boys and later known as the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, referred to in this resolution as "Dozier School," was opened by the State of Florida in 1900 in Marianna to house children who had committed minor criminal offenses, such as incorrigibility, truancy, and smoking, as well as more serious offenses such as theft and murder, and

WHEREAS, many of the children who were sent to Dozier School were sentenced without legal representation before the court, often without a known basis for being sent to the school or a specific duration of confinement, and

WHEREAS, within the first 13 years of Dozier School's operation, six state-led investigations were conducted in response to reports of children being chained to walls in irons, severely beaten, and used for child labor, and

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

WHEREAS, many former students of Dozier School have sworn under oath that they were beaten at a facility located on the

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30 school grounds known as the "White House," and

31 WHEREAS, a psychologist employed at Dozier School testified  
32 under oath at a 1958 United States Senate Judiciary Committee  
33 hearing that boys at the school were beaten by an administrator,  
34 that the blows were severe and dealt with a great deal of force  
35 with a full arm swing over the head and down, that a leather  
36 strap approximately 10 inches long was used, and that the  
37 beatings were "brutality," and

38 WHEREAS, a former Dozier School employee stated in  
39 interviews with law enforcement that, in 1962, several employees  
40 of the school were removed from the facility based upon  
41 allegations that they made sexual advances toward boys at the  
42 facility, and

43 WHEREAS, a forensic investigation funded by the Florida  
44 Legislature and conducted from 2013 to 2016 by the University of  
45 South Florida found incomplete records regarding deaths and  
46 burials that occurred at Dozier School between 1900 and 1960,  
47 and that families were often notified after the child was buried  
48 or denied access to their remains at the time of burial, and

49 WHEREAS, the excavations conducted as part of the forensic  
50 investigation yielded 55 burial sites, 24 more sites than  
51 reported in official records, and

52 WHEREAS, given the lack of documentation and contradictions  
53 in the historical record, questions persist regarding the  
54 identity of persons buried at Dozier School and the  
55 circumstances surrounding their deaths, and

56 WHEREAS, in 1955, the State of Florida opened a new reform  
57 school in Okeechobee, called the Florida School for Boys at  
58 Okeechobee, referred to in this resolution as "the Okeechobee

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59 School," to address overcrowding at Dozier School, and staff of  
60 Dozier School were transferred to the Okeechobee School where  
61 similar practices were implemented, and

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

65 WHEREAS, former Governor Claude Kirk toured Dozier School  
66 in 1968 and stated, "If one of your kids were kept in such  
67 circumstances, you'd be up there with rifles," and

68 WHEREAS, Dozier School was closed in 2011 after  
69 investigations by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and  
70 the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of  
71 Justice, and

72 WHEREAS, more than 500 former students of Dozier School and  
73 the Okeechobee School have come forward with reports of  
74 physical, mental, and sexual abuse by school staff during the  
75 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and resulting trauma that has endured  
76 throughout their adult lives, NOW, THEREFORE,

77

78 Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida:

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80 That the Senate regrets that the treatment of boys who were  
81 sent to the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys and the Okeechobee  
82 School was cruel, unjust, and a violation of human decency, and  
83 acknowledges this shameful part of the State of Florida's  
84 history.

85 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate apologizes to the  
86 boys who were confined to Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys and  
87 the Okeechobee School and their family members for the wrongs

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88 committed against them by employees of the State of Florida.

89 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate expresses its  
90 commitment to ensuring that children who have been placed in the  
91 State of Florida's care are protected from abuse and violations  
92 of fundamental human decency.