

1 House Resolution

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

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

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

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

25 WHEREAS, throughout Dozier School's history, reports of

26 | abuse, suspicious deaths, and threats of closure plagued the
27 | school, and

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

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78 | Be It Resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of
79 | Florida:

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

86 | BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Representatives
87 | apologizes to the boys who were confined to Arthur G. Dozier
88 | School for Boys and the Okeechobee School and their family
89 | members for the wrongs committed against them by employees of
90 | the State of Florida.

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