

By Senator Gibson

6-00136-19

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act for the relief of Justin Williamson by the St.
3 Johns County School District; providing an
4 appropriation to compensate him for injuries and
5 damages sustained as a result of the negligence of the
6 St. Johns County School District; providing a
7 limitation on the payment of attorney fees; providing
8 an effective date.

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10 WHEREAS, on the morning of September 9, 2014, Justin
11 Williamson, along with his passenger, Amber Middleton, was
12 driving toward Palatka on State Road 207, and

13 WHEREAS, a St. Johns County school bus, operated by Linda
14 Fox in the scope of her employment with the St. Johns County
15 School District, was traveling on Armstrong Road and crossed
16 State Road 207 into Mr. Williamson's lane of travel, and

17 WHEREAS, the bus struck the driver's side of Mr.
18 Williamson's vehicle, crushing it and trapping a critically
19 injured Mr. Williamson inside, and

20 WHEREAS, Mr. Williamson's injuries from the crash included
21 damage to his spleen and hematoma, abrasions on multiple sites,
22 three shattered teeth in the left side of his mouth, a
23 dislocated left radial head, a fracture of his left humerus, a
24 left femur fracture, as well as other injuries as reflected in
25 the medical evidence introduced at trial, and

26 WHEREAS, Mr. Williamson was airlifted to Halifax Health
27 Medical Center, where he spent days recovering, and then was
28 transferred to Brooks Rehabilitation for weeks of
29 rehabilitation, and

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30 WHEREAS, for 185 days, Mr. Williamson was either bedridden
31 or relegated to a wheelchair, could not perform basic everyday
32 tasks without help from his wife and others, and had trouble
33 sleeping for more than 1 hour at a time, and

34 WHEREAS, Mr. Williamson still experiences significant pain,
35 walks with a limp, continues to have trouble sleeping, and has
36 serious mobility issues, and

37 WHEREAS, as a result of the crash, Mr. Williamson is no
38 longer able to pursue hobbies he undertook before the incident,
39 such as rock climbing, instructing and practicing taekwondo, and
40 generally enjoying an athletic lifestyle, and

41 WHEREAS, as the operator of a school bus, Ms. Fox had the
42 duty to drive the bus in a safe manner and in accordance with
43 state law, but failed to do so, and

44 WHEREAS, as a result of the collision, Ms. Fox was cited
45 for failing to yield the right-of-way, and

46 WHEREAS, in February 2018, Mr. Williamson sued the St.
47 Johns County School District, and during the subsequent trial
48 doctors involved with his case testified that Mr. Williamson
49 sustained severe injuries as a result of the crash, will
50 continue to need medical care, and will never regain the level
51 of physical well-being he experienced before the incident, and

52 WHEREAS, experts who testified at the trial estimated that
53 Mr. Williamson's future care will cost \$527,405.16 and that his
54 inability to work will result in the loss of between \$513,000
55 and \$822,800 in wages over his lifetime, and

56 WHEREAS, Judge Michael Traynor of the Seventh Judicial
57 Circuit found the St. Johns County School District liable for
58 the injuries and damages suffered by Mr. Williamson, and

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59 WHEREAS, the trial court ordered the St. Johns County
60 School District to pay a final judgment of \$1,955,161.93 to Mr.
61 Williamson, and

62 WHEREAS, the St. Johns County School District has paid none
63 of the statutory limit of \$200,000 pursuant to s. 768.28,
64 Florida Statutes, applicable at the time the claim arose, to Mr.
65 Williamson as compensation for the injuries and damages incurred
66 as a result of the crash, and

67 WHEREAS, the full amount of the \$1,955,161.93 final
68 judgment remains unpaid, NOW, THEREFORE,

69

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

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72 Section 1. The facts stated in the preamble to this act are
73 found and declared to be true.

74 Section 2. The St. Johns County School District is
75 authorized and directed to appropriate from funds not otherwise
76 encumbered and to draw a warrant payable to Justin Williamson in
77 the sum of \$1,955,161.93 as compensation for injuries and
78 damages he sustained.

79 Section 3. The amount awarded under this act is intended to
80 provide the sole compensation for all present and future claims
81 arising out of the factual situation described in this act which
82 resulted in injuries and damages to Justin Williamson. The total
83 amount paid for attorney fees relating to this claim may not
84 exceed 25 percent of the amount awarded under this act.

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