

By Senator Grall

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A bill to be entitled

An act for the relief of Eugene Wyatt; providing an appropriation to compensate Mr. Wyatt for injuries and damages sustained as a result of his confinement at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys if certain conditions are met; providing a limitation on compensation and the payment of attorney fees; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, in 1900, the Florida State Reform School, also known as the Florida Industrial School for Boys, the Florida School for Boys, the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, and most commonly called the Dozier School, was opened in Marianna by the state to house children who were found guilty of committing minor criminal offenses, such as incorrigibility, truancy, and smoking, as well as more serious offenses, such as theft and murder, and

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

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

WHEREAS, a psychologist employed at the Dozier School testified under oath at a 1958 United States Senate Judiciary Committee hearing that boys at the school were beaten by an administrator, that the blows were severe and were dealt with great force using a leather strap approximately 10 inches long which was brought down from a full-arm swing over the head, and that the beatings constituted "brutality," and

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

WHEREAS, during the 2017 legislative session, the Legislature unanimously issued a formal apology to the victims of Florida reform school abuse with the passage of CS/SR 1440 and CS/HR 1335, expressing regret for the treatment of boys who were sent to the Dozier School and the Okeechobee School; acknowledging that the treatment was cruel, unjust, and a violation of human decency; and expressing the Legislature's commitment to ensure that children who have been placed in the state's care will be protected from abuse and violations of human decency, and

WHEREAS, on January 20, 1964, Eugene Wyatt was committed to the Dozier School for delinquency and was received at the Dozier School on February 3, 1964, and

WHEREAS, on February 23, 1965, Mr. Wyatt was discharged from the Dozier School, and

WHEREAS, during the 2024 legislative session, the Legislature unanimously passed CS/HB 21 that established the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program, which authorized former students of the Dozier School to submit applications to the Department of Legal Affairs for compensation under s. 16.63, Florida Statutes, and

WHEREAS, under the program, an applicant needed to provide the Department of Legal Affairs with his name; his date of birth; his mailing address; the name of the school confined to;

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proof of mental, physical, or sexual abuse perpetrated by school personnel during his confinement; and a signed statement acknowledging that he waives the right to further compensation related to his confinement at the school, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wyatt was unable to submit an application for compensation under the program before the prescribed deadline passed, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wyatt now seeks \$21,253.98 as compensation for the period of time he was committed at the Dozier School, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wyatt, without a legal or administrative remedy to seek redress for his confinement in the Dozier School, seeks equitable relief from the Legislature, NOW, THEREFORE,

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

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

Section 2. The sum of \$21,253.98 is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Legal Affairs for the relief of Eugene Wyatt for injuries and damages sustained.

Section 3. The Chief Financial Officer is directed to draw a warrant in favor of Eugene Wyatt in the sum of \$21,253.98 upon funds of the Department of Legal Affairs in the State Treasury and to pay the same out of such funds in the State Treasury upon Mr. Wyatt otherwise satisfying the conditions set forth in s. 16.62, Florida Statutes.

Section 4. The amount paid by the Department of Legal Affairs as awarded under this act is intended to provide the sole compensation for all present and future claims arising out

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88 of the factual situation described in this act which resulted in
89 injuries and damages to Eugene Wyatt. The total amount paid for
90 attorney fees relating to this claim may not exceed 25 percent
91 of the total amount awarded under this act.

92 Section 5. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.