

## Committee on Rules

### **HB 7115 — Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys**

by Judiciary Committee and Reps. Harrison, Stafford, and others

The bill provides for the internment of certain remains exhumed from the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys; establishes the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys Memorial; requires the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to convey, maintain, and surplus certain lands associated with the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys.

From January 1, 1900, to June 30, 2011, the state operated a reform school in the panhandle town of Marianna, Florida. The school operated under several different names: the Florida State Reform School (1900-1913), the Florida Industrial School for Boys (1914-1957), the Florida School for Boys (1957-1967), and the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys (1967-2011). In recent years, former students of the school have come forward to report repeated abuse by staff members, including severe beatings at a structure on school grounds known as the “White House.” These men believe that fellow students may have died from abuse and are buried on school grounds. In 2012, researchers from the University of South Florida (USF) began an investigation to determine the location of children buried at the school in order to excavate and repatriate the remains to their families. In January 2016, the researchers issued a report of their findings. The researchers analyzed historical records and determined that nearly 100 boys aged 6 to 18 died at the school between 1900 and 1973. During the investigation, the researchers excavated 55 graves and discovered 55 sets of human remains on the school grounds, only 13 of which were located in Boot Hill Cemetery on Dozier school property. The researchers made 7 positive identifications and 14 presumptive identifications of the remains.

In 2016, the Dozier Task Force, which was created by the Legislature, submitted the following recommendations:

1. The remains of the 1914 dormitory fire victims should be reinterred at Boot Hill Cemetery on Dozier School property.
2. Unidentified or unclaimed remains should be reinterred in Tallahassee.
3. Two memorials should be established, one in Jackson County and one in Tallahassee, Florida, dedicated to the memories of the boys who lived and died at Dozier School, as well as the 1914 dormitory fire victims.

The bill:

1. Implements the three recommendations of the task force.
2. Requires the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to convey portions of Dozier School property to Jackson County, including property on which Boot Hill Cemetery and the White House are located, and provides for the preservation of Boot Hill Cemetery and the White House.
3. Requires the Department of Environmental Protection to prepare a proposal to conduct a feasibility study to locate previously unidentified potential burial sites through surface and sub-surface evaluation on all lands formally associated with the school.

4. Names the Department of Law Enforcement's Forensic Training Center in Pasco County the "Thomas Varnadoe Forensic Center for Education and Research." Thomas Varnadoe died at Dozier School on October 26, 1934, just 34 days after he was admitted to the school. His remains were identified by USF after being exhumed as part of its investigation.

Lastly, the bill appropriates \$1.2 million from general revenue to the Department of Management Services to pay for reinternment of remains exhumed from Dozier School and establishment of the memorial.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.

*Vote: Senate 35-0; House 117-0*