

By Representative Chestnut

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to Columbia County; providing
3 for the relief of Runette J. Bass; providing
4 for an appropriation to compensate her for
5 injuries and damages sustained as a result of
6 the actions of the Sheriff of Columbia County;
7 providing an effective date.

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9 WHEREAS, on November 27, 1992, Runette J. Bass was
10 lawfully operating her automobile when she was struck by a
11 vehicle being pursued by a Columbia County Sheriff's Deputy,
12 and

13 WHEREAS, the deputy that was in pursuit violated the
14 internal policy of the Columbia County Sheriff's Office
15 relating to pursuit of fleeing vehicles, and

16 WHEREAS, as a result of the accident, Runette J. Bass
17 sustained catastrophic injuries and was immediately flown to
18 the hospital where she was initially listed in critical
19 condition, and

20 WHEREAS, Runette J. Bass sustained numerous injuries
21 which included an open fracture across her forehead and into
22 her sinus cavity, burns to her face and left side of her body,
23 internal injuries that resulted in surgery to remove her
24 spleen, fractures of the pelvis in two places, a crushed left
25 hand which required three resulting surgeries to repair the
26 injuries to her hand and subsequent physical therapy, severe
27 laceration and loss of tissue of her left hand and subsequent
28 skin grafts, severe and permanent injury to her right eye and
29 a subsequent traumatic cataract, and surgery to remove the
30 cataract, and

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1 WHEREAS, Runette J. Bass has sustained horrible injury,
2 pain, and physical disfigurement, and has incurred medical
3 expenses of \$133,897.04 as of February 20, 1997, with future
4 medical expenses expected to exceed \$100,000, and

5 WHEREAS, the accident in which Runette J. Bass
6 sustained the above-mentioned injuries formed the basis of
7 legal action against the Sheriff of Columbia County, and

8 WHEREAS, the court found beyond and to the exclusion of
9 reasonable doubt that Columbia County Sheriff's Office
10 personnel intentionally altered its videotape of the pursuit,
11 and

12 WHEREAS, the court found the actions of the Columbia
13 County Sheriff's Office to be so egregious that it struck the
14 Sheriff's affirmative defenses and his answer to the
15 complaint, and entered a default judgment against the Columbia
16 County Sheriff's Office, and

17 WHEREAS, the Sheriff of Columbia County then appealed
18 the ruling to the First District Court of Appeal, and

19 WHEREAS, the district court of appeal upheld the trial
20 court's ruling, and

21 WHEREAS, the Sheriff of Columbia County then appealed
22 to the Florida Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case,
23 and

24 WHEREAS, after a week-long trial, the jury reached a
25 verdict of \$2,953,873.64 in favor of Runette J. Bass, and

26 WHEREAS, the Columbia County Sheriff's Office has an
27 insurance policy through the Florida Sheriff's Self-Insurance
28 Fund with a policy limit of \$2,100,000, and

29 WHEREAS, Runette J. Bass's injuries and disfigurement
30 were horrific and permanent and she has been relegated to a
31 life of pain, humiliation, and emotional anguish, and

1 WHEREAS, Runette J. Bass will have to continue to
2 receive medical treatment for her injuries throughout the
3 remainder of her life, NOW, THEREFORE,

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

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

9 Section 2. The Sheriff of Columbia County is
10 authorized and directed to appropriate from funds of the
11 county not otherwise appropriated and to draw a warrant in the
12 sum of \$2,953,873.64 payable to Runette J. Bass to compensate
13 her for injuries and damages sustained.

14 Section 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a
15 law.

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