

**By** the Committees on Appropriations; and Judiciary; and Senators Bracy and Rodriguez

576-04298-20

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1                                   A bill to be entitled  
2       An act relating to the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots;  
3       directing the Commissioner of Education's African  
4       American History Task Force to determine ways in which  
5       the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots may be included in  
6       required instruction on African-American history;  
7       requiring the task force to submit recommendations to  
8       the commissioner and the State Board of Education by a  
9       specified date; directing the Secretary of State to  
10      take certain action regarding the inclusion of the  
11      history of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots in museum  
12      exhibits; directing the Secretary of Environmental  
13      Protection to assess naming opportunities for state  
14      parks, or a portion of a facility therein, in  
15      recognizing victims of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day  
16      Riots; authorizing the secretary to appoint a  
17      committee to assist in assessing naming opportunities;  
18      requiring the secretary to submit recommendations to  
19      the Legislature under specified circumstances;  
20      encouraging district school boards to assess naming  
21      opportunities for school facilities in recognizing  
22      victims of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots;  
23      providing an effective date.

24  
25       WHEREAS, in the decades following the conclusion of  
26      Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws were enacted throughout the  
27      southern United States, including Florida, which mandated  
28      segregation and imposed numerous restrictions, such as the  
29      imposition of poll taxes and literacy requirements, thereby

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30 suppressing the ability of African Americans to participate in  
31 the democratic process, and

32 WHEREAS, throughout the country, organizations such as the  
33 Ku Klux Klan staged rallies, marches, and other demonstrations  
34 in an effort to intimidate African Americans and any allies from  
35 organizing and attempting to exercise the right to vote, and

36 WHEREAS, as the 1920 presidential election approached,  
37 efforts were undertaken in Orange County by numerous  
38 organizations and individuals, including Judge John M. Cheney  
39 and two prominent African-American residents of Ocoee, Julius  
40 "July" Perry and Moses Norman, to register African-American  
41 voters to allow for their participation in the upcoming  
42 election, and

43 WHEREAS, on November 2, 1920, as several African Americans  
44 in Ocoee, including Moses Norman, unsuccessfully attempted to  
45 vote on Election Day, violence ensued as a mob of approximately  
46 100 white men formed and marched to Julius "July" Perry's  
47 residence, and proceeded to open gunfire as Julius "July" Perry  
48 attempted to defend himself along with his property and family,  
49 and

50 WHEREAS, after the Perry family eventually fled the  
51 residence, Julius "July" Perry was soon arrested and  
52 subsequently shot and lynched after the mob gained access to his  
53 jail cell with the aid of local law enforcement, and

54 WHEREAS, the violence spread throughout the African-  
55 American community of Ocoee and upwards of 60 people are  
56 estimated to have perished while dozens of homes, two churches,  
57 and a lodge meeting hall were set ablaze and gunfire overtook  
58 the community, and

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59 WHEREAS, in the aftermath of the riots, nearly all African-  
60 American residents of the community were forced to flee,  
61 abandoning their residences and property and relocating  
62 elsewhere, and

63 WHEREAS, there is no record that state or local government  
64 officials took any action to prevent the tragedy that occurred  
65 in Ocoee, or reasonably investigated the matter in the riot's  
66 aftermath in an effort to bring the perpetrators of the incident  
67 to justice or to allow the displaced African-American residents  
68 to return to their homes and property, and

69 WHEREAS, in November 2018, the Ocoee City Commission  
70 adopted a proclamation that acknowledged the acts of domestic  
71 terror inflicted upon the African-American residents of Ocoee  
72 and western Orange County on November 2, 1920, and required the  
73 installation of a historical marker in a public space describing  
74 the events of that day, and

75 WHEREAS, the Florida Legislature recognizes an obligation  
76 to acknowledge the injuries, damages, infringement of civil  
77 rights, and loss of life that African-American residents  
78 sustained as a result of the violence and destruction that  
79 occurred in Ocoee in November 1920, NOW, THEREFORE,

80

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

82

83 Section 1. The Commissioner of Education's African American  
84 History Task Force is directed to examine ways in which the  
85 history of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots may be included in  
86 instruction on African-American history required pursuant to s.  
87 1003.42 (2) (h), Florida Statutes. The task force shall submit its

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88 recommendations to the Commissioner of Education and the State  
89 Board of Education by March 1, 2021.

90 Section 2. The Secretary of State is directed to:

91 (1) In coordination with the Division of Cultural Affairs  
92 of the Department of State, determine ways in which the Museum  
93 of Florida History and other state museums may promote the  
94 history of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots through exhibits  
95 and educational programs.

96 (2) Collaborate with the National Museum of African  
97 American History and Culture of the Smithsonian Institution to  
98 seek inclusion of the history of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day  
99 Riots in the museum's exhibits.

100 Section 3. The Secretary of Environmental Protection is  
101 directed to assess if any state park, or a portion of or a  
102 facility therein, may be named in recognition of any victim of  
103 the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots. The secretary may appoint a  
104 committee to assess naming opportunities. If a change to state  
105 law is required in order to change the designation of a state  
106 park, or a portion of or a facility therein, the secretary shall  
107 submit any such recommendation to the President of the Senate  
108 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

109 Section 4. District school boards are encouraged to assess  
110 naming opportunities for school facilities in recognition of  
111 victims of the 1920 Ocoee Election Day Riots.

112 Section 5. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.