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1                   A bill to be entitled  
2           An act relating to compensation of the descendants of  
3           Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and  
4           Ernest Thomas; providing that certain facts are found  
5           and declared to be true; providing that a sum is  
6           appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the  
7           Department of State for specified relief; providing  
8           that specified persons are ineligible for further  
9           compensation; providing an effective date.

10  
11           WHEREAS, on July 16, 1949, a 17-year-old white woman and  
12           her estranged husband reported to police that they had been  
13           attacked and that she had been raped by four black men after the  
14           car that she and her husband were riding in broke down on a  
15           rural road outside Groveland, in Lake County, and

16           WHEREAS, despite the lack of physical evidence in the case  
17           and the established alibis of the accused, Charles Greenlee,  
18           Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas, the four men  
19           were presumed guilty, and

20           WHEREAS, Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd, both World War II  
21           veterans, acknowledged that they had stopped by the broken-down  
22           vehicle to see if they could assist the couple, but denied any  
23           involvement in the alleged rape, and

24           WHEREAS, Mr. Greenlee, who was only 16 years old at the  
25           time, and Mr. Thomas denied ever meeting the alleged victim and

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26 her estranged husband, and

27 WHEREAS, after their arrest that evening, Mr. Greenlee, Mr.  
28 Irvin, and Mr. Shepherd were severely beaten in the basement of  
29 the county jail, and Mr. Greenlee and Mr. Shepherd were coerced  
30 into confessing to the crime, while Mr. Irvin refused to admit  
31 guilt, and

32 WHEREAS, Mr. Thomas, who fled the county, was shot to death  
33 several days later in Madison County by members of a deputized  
34 posse of armed men, resulting in more than 400 gunshot wounds,  
35 and

36 WHEREAS, the three surviving men, Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin,  
37 and Mr. Shepherd, were tried and convicted in the case, with Mr.  
38 Greenlee sentenced to life imprisonment due to his age and Mr.  
39 Irvin and Mr. Shepherd sentenced to death, and

40 WHEREAS, Thurgood Marshall, then executive director of the  
41 NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, appealed the  
42 convictions of Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd to the United States  
43 Supreme Court, which unanimously overturned the judgments on  
44 April 9, 1951, and ordered a retrial, and

45 WHEREAS, seven months later, in November 1951, while  
46 transporting Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd from Florida State  
47 Prison in Raiford to Tavares State Prison for a pretrial  
48 hearing, Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall and Deputy Sheriff  
49 James L. Yates shot both men on a dirt road leading into  
50 Umatilla, claiming that they had shot the handcuffed men in

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51 self-defense when the two tried to escape, and

52 WHEREAS, Mr. Shepherd died at the scene as a result of his  
53 wounds, but Mr. Irvin, who pretended to be dead, survived and  
54 accused the sheriff and his deputy of attempted murder, but no  
55 charges were ever brought against the officers, and

56 WHEREAS, despite Mr. Irvin having been retried and  
57 convicted a second time of the crime and sentenced to death, his  
58 sentence was commuted to life in prison in 1954 by then-Governor  
59 LeRoy Collins, who was not convinced of Mr. Irvin's guilt, and

60 WHEREAS, in 1970, while visiting Lake County, Mr. Irvin,  
61 who had been paroled 2 years earlier by then-Governor Claude  
62 Kirk, was found dead in his car, and, while Mr. Irvin's death  
63 was officially attributed to natural causes, Thurgood Marshall  
64 reportedly doubted the circumstances surrounding Mr. Irvin's  
65 death, and

66 WHEREAS, Mr. Greenlee, who was paroled in 1962 after  
67 serving 12 years in prison, died in April 2012 at the age of 78,  
68 and

69 WHEREAS, in 2017, the Legislature unanimously adopted House  
70 Concurrent Resolution 631 acknowledging the grave injustices  
71 perpetrated against Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, Mr. Shepherd, and  
72 Mr. Thomas, apologizing to each of them and their families, and  
73 urging the Governor and the Cabinet to perform an expedited  
74 clemency review of their cases for the purpose of granting the  
75 men full pardons, and

76 WHEREAS, on January 11, 2019, Governor DeSantis issued full  
 77 pardons, which were unanimously approved by the Board of  
 78 Executive Clemency, to Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, Mr. Shepherd,  
 79 and Mr. Thomas, and

80 WHEREAS, on November 22, 2021, the State Attorney's Office  
 81 of Lake County filed a motion in the Circuit Court of the Fifth  
 82 Judicial Circuit to dismiss the indictments of Mr. Shepherd and  
 83 Mr. Thomas and to set aside the convictions and sentences of Mr.  
 84 Greenlee and Mr. Irvin, which motion was granted, and

85 WHEREAS, the State of Florida recognizes an obligation to  
 86 equitably redress the injuries, damages, infringement of civil  
 87 rights, and loss of life that Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, Mr.  
 88 Shepherd, Mr. Thomas, and their families sustained as a result  
 89 of the events that transpired in Lake County, NOW, THEREFORE,

90

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

92

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

95 **Section 2.** A sum as specified in the General  
 96 Appropriations Act is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund  
 97 to the Department of State for the relief of the descendants of  
 98 Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest  
 99 Thomas.

100 **Section 3.** A person compensated under this act is

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101 | ineligible for any further compensation related to the factual  
102 | situation described in this act.

103 |       **Section 4.** This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.