

CHAPTER 2024-254

Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 21

An act relating to the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program; creating s. 16.63, F.S.; establishing the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program within the Department of Legal Affairs; specifying the purpose of the program; requiring the department to provide specified notice of the program; requiring the department to accept and process applications for the payment of compensation claims under the program; specifying application procedures and requirements; requiring the department to issue application approvals or denials under specified conditions; requiring notice of application approval or denial; requiring the department to pay a specified compensation amount to approved applicants; limiting the compensation an applicant may receive related to the claim; providing for rulemaking; authorizing the Commissioner of Education to award a standard high school diploma to specified persons; providing an appropriation; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Section 16.63, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

16.63 Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program.—

(1) The Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program is established within the Department of Legal Affairs. The purpose of the program is to compensate living persons who were confined to the Dozier School for Boys or the Okeechobee School at any time between 1940 and 1975 and who were subjected to mental, physical, or sexual abuse perpetrated by school personnel while they were so confined.

(2) The Department of Legal Affairs shall accept, review, and approve or deny applications for the payment of compensation claims under this section. Notice of the availability of such compensation must be given and any relevant forms made available for download on a page of the department's official website accessible through a direct link on the website's homepage, which link and page must be titled "The Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program."

(3) An application for compensation under this section must be made by a living person who was confined to the Dozier School for Boys or the Okeechobee School between 1940 and 1975; the personal representative or estate of a decedent may not file an application for or receive compensation under this section. Such application must be made on a form approved by the department and include:

(a) The applicant's name, date of birth, mailing address, phone number, and, if available, electronic mail address.

(b) The name of the school in which the applicant was confined and the approximate dates of the applicant's confinement.

(c) Reasonable proof submitted as attachments establishing that the applicant was both:

1. Confined to the Dozier School for Boys or the Okeechobee School between 1940 and 1975, which proof may include school records submitted with a notarized certificate of authenticity signed by the records custodian or certified court records.

2. A victim of mental, physical, or sexual abuse perpetrated by school personnel during the applicant's confinement, which proof may include a notarized statement signed by the applicant attesting to the abuse the applicant suffered.

(d) A signed statement from the applicant acknowledging that, by accepting compensation under this section, the applicant waives any right to further compensation related to the applicant's confinement at the Dozier School for Boys or the Okeechobee School or any abuse suffered during such confinement.

An application for compensation under this section must be signed by the applicant under oath. A false statement in such application, including in any attachment or exhibit submitted therewith, is subject to the penalty of perjury under s. 837.012.

(4) Applications for compensation under this section must be submitted no later than December 31, 2024.

(5) Upon completed review of an application submitted under this section, the department shall either:

(a) Subject to appropriation, approve a one-time payment to an applicant whose application meets the criteria specified in this section. Each approved applicant shall receive an equal share of the funds appropriated for this purpose.

(b) Deny the payment of compensation under this section to an applicant whose application does not meet the criteria specified in this section.

Written notice of such approval or denial must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the mailing address provided by the applicant on the application form. An applicant whose application is rejected for providing insufficient information may submit a new application as provided in subsection (4).

(6) A person compensated under this section is ineligible for any further compensation related to the person's confinement at the Dozier School for Boys or the Okeechobee School or any abuse suffered during such confinement.

(7) The department shall adopt by rule procedures and forms necessary to administer this section.

Section 2. Pursuant to rules adopted by the State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education may award a standard high school diploma to a person compensated pursuant to s. 16.63, Florida Statutes, who has not completed high school graduation requirements.

Section 3. For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the sum of \$20 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Legal Affairs for the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program.

Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2024.

Approved by the Governor June 21, 2024.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 21, 2024.