

\$20 Million Allocation for Dozier Survivors Is a Call to Action for Lawyers

Firm that pushed legislators to approve compensation for survivors of Florida youth "reform schools" offers victims free help with forms to access funds.

PENSACOLA, FL, U.S.A., March 18, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Monday, March 4, 2024, the Florida Senate took a significant step towards justice for victims of abuse at the Dozier School for Boys and the Okeechobee School for Boys by unanimously approving a \$20 million allocation for the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program (CS/HB 21).

Although this vital allocation represents a crucial milestone in addressing the harrowing experiences of those who, as children, endured

beatings, rapes, and even death at these institutions, Levin Papantonio Rafferty (LPR) Attorney Mike Papantonio and Attorney Troy Rafferty say if lawyers had done things differently in the past, many of these abuses never would have happened.

"This long, ugly history of what happened at Dozier is a result of lawyers 50 years ago not using their licenses to accomplish some good," Papantonio said.

A New Directive for Lawyers

"It's sad to me that a lawyer today dwells in a comfort zone, using their license for something as basic as '1-800-CARCRASH' when they could use that same license to accomplish some broad, basic good in this country," Papantonio said.

LPR attorneys practice what Papantonio preaches--and their efforts extend far beyond the walls

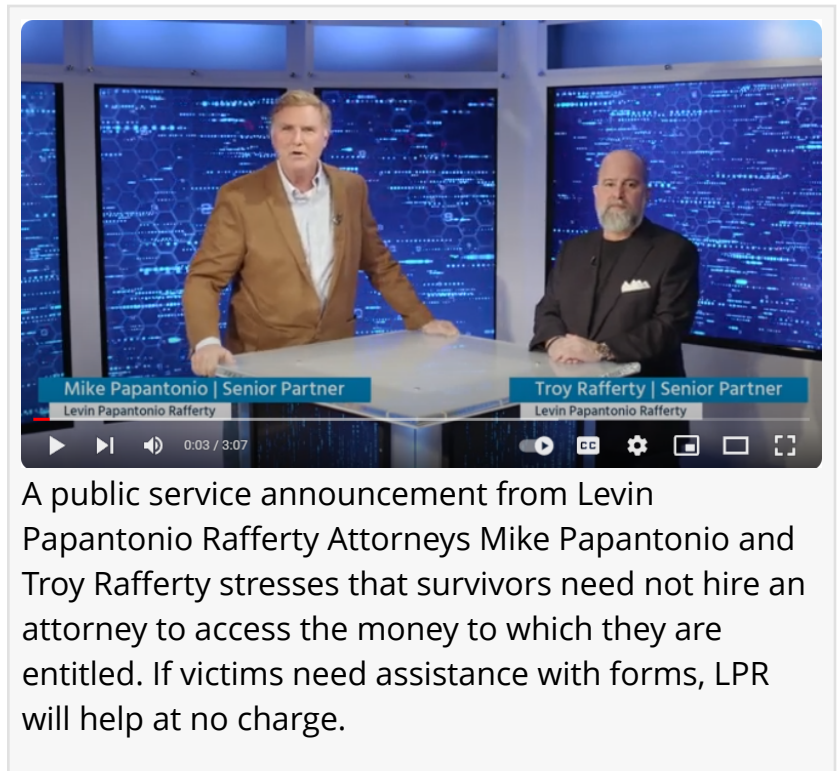


At the Florida Capitol on Monday, Levin Papantonio Rafferty Attorney Troy Rafferty was thanked for his tireless pursuit of justice on behalf of survivors of abuse at the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School for Boys.

of the Dozier School. The firm combines legal skills and investigative prowess with creative measures to tackle a myriad of modern-day wrongdoings, including those in today's "troubled-teen" industry.

Papantonio said the Dozier legislation should mark the beginning of an effort by lawyers in 2024 to not make the same mistakes attorneys made half a century ago: refusing to step up when abuse at the Florida state-run schools was still happening (the "schools" were shuttered in 2011).

Most recently, LPR has been working with Paris Hilton, an advocate for survivors of the troubled teen industry, to inform the legal community and the general public that abuses like Dozier are still happening today, all over the country. According to Papantonio, the firm is representing "8-10 serious cases" as a result of this effort.



A public service announcement from Levin Papantonio Rafferty Attorneys Mike Papantonio and Troy Rafferty stresses that survivors need not hire an attorney to access the money to which they are entitled. If victims need assistance with forms, LPR will help at no charge.

“

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*MIKE PAPANTONIO, ATTORNEY
AND SHAREHOLDER, LEVIN
PAPANTONIO RAFFERTY*

LPR has also filed multiple lawsuits in Alabama, some against state agencies and officials for [discrimination against and abuse of disabled children](#) in residential childcare facilities (Case 2:23-cv-00558-KFP; Case 2:23-cv-00554-ECM-CWB; Case 2:23-cv-00555-KFP; Case 2:23-cv-00556-SMD; Case 2:23-cv-00553-SMD; Case 2:23-cv-00557-SMD) and another against the [Laurel Oaks Behavioral Center](#) for the sexual assault of an 8-year-old resident (CV 2022-900168.00).

About the Dozier Legislation

The approval of Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program, designated as #HB 21 and sponsored by Rep. Michelle Salzman, R-Pensacola, and Rep. Kiyon Michael, R-Jacksonville, marks a historic moment for survivors who have tirelessly fought for justice for over 16 years.

More than 30 Dozier victims and family members were at the Capitol Monday to witness this historical legislation. Many of them testified in House and Senate hearings in prior weeks to the horrific abuse and rapes they suffered as children at the state-run "reform schools."

How Lawyers Made a Difference

The unwavering commitment of Papantonio and Rafferty in advocating for these survivors and pushing for this essential restitution made all the difference between previous, unsuccessful efforts and Monday's triumph in the Florida legislature.

Upon taking on the mission to champion the rights of victims, Papantonio and Rafferty traveled to the Dozier School with survivors to hear firsthand about their experiences. The attorneys were accompanied by a film crew producing a documentary about the institutions.

Reflecting on the haunting legacy of the Dozier School, Rafferty expressed, "One of the saddest days of my life was the day I walked through the Dozier School grounds with men who survived the horrors of Dozier as young boys. The evil is still there. It is palpable. I felt it in the core of my being."

Papantonio and Rafferty recorded a Public Service Announcement about the Dozier compensation legislation, stressing to viewers that these funds are available for victims, and they do not need to hire an attorney to access the money to which they are entitled. If victims need assistance with forms, Levin Papantonio Rafferty will help at no charge.

Fighting for Legislation

For the last two years, Rafferty has been meeting with legislators to underscore the importance of compensating victims for the abuse they endured at Dozier and Okeechobee. A pivotal move in this effort was Rafferty convincing Rep. Salzman to sponsor the bill.

Rafferty shared with Salzman the gravity of the situation, highlighting that 183 children who were admitted to the Dozier School have never been located. He described the appalling conditions faced by these children, including the use of a 20-inch mallet with a leather strap and metal rivets--a weapon used repeatedly to inflict harm. He told her about the medical experiments conducted on kids. She was convinced something had to be done.

"I cannot overstate the role Representative Salzman played in Monday's outcome," Rafferty said. "She has been utterly fierce in her dedication to these victims."

Where Things Stand

The approved measure not only allocates funds for compensation but also establishes a process for survivors to apply for restitution. Additionally, it enables the Florida Department of Education to award high-school diplomas to former students who were unable to complete graduation requirements.

Now, as the measure awaits action from Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, survivors and advocates emphasize the urgency of ensuring restitution for decades of pain and suffering. This allocation is a significant step towards acknowledging and addressing the profound injustices inflicted upon the victims of abuse at the Dozier and Okeechobee Schools.

Additional Dozier Facts

In 2017, the Florida Legislature passed House Bill 7115, establishing the Dozier School for Boys Memorial. "The memorial in Marianna is designed to tell the story of the boys who lived and died while at the school," stated a DMS press release.

In 2013, a team of anthropologists from the University of South Florida excavated the facility grounds. Over time, the team discovered 55 sets of human child remains.

Papantonio and Rafferty are participating in "The Florida Boys," a documentary about the Dozier School for Boys.

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