



## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

February 24, 2015

The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Holder:

I am writing to respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Justice examine new evidence about the deaths of youth at a now-defunct Florida reform school as part of the agency's ongoing probe of more recent inmate deaths in the state's prison system. Given new information about wards of the shuttered reform school, and a long history of mistreatment allegations surrounding the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Marianna, Florida, I believe the department is uniquely positioned to provide an outside and independent review.

Earlier this month, researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) reported that they have found the remains of 51 individuals buried on the grounds of the reform school. This contrasts with a 2009 Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) investigation concluding that 31 individuals were buried on the school grounds. Having brought USF's initial research to the Justice Department's attention in 2012, I remain troubled that university researchers have uncovered information not contained in the state's 2009 report.

I am grateful for the assistance the department already has provided USF through a 2013 grant from the National Institute of Justice, which has helped fund the forensic research - research that indicates children at Dozier suffered from nutritional deficiencies, lack of dental care, and underdevelopment. In one grave, officials discovered what they think may be a buckshot. Yet in 2012, when the FDLE was asked to comment on the university's initial findings, officials characterized them as just "an academic research study" with a different standard and scope than a law enforcement investigation. Local law enforcement, meantime, has expressed no interest in investigating. Thus, a federal investigation may be the best alternative.

As the Justice Department works to provide answers and closure for the families of Florida prison inmates whose deaths may have stemmed from potential violations of their constitutional rights, I hope you will do the same for the families of these deceased young wards of the state. I am enclosing a copy of USF's 15-page report detailing its findings. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.  
Bill Nelson