

By: Senator(s) Jordan, Jackson (11th),
Harden, Walls, Butler, Frazier, Simmons,
Horhn, Thomas, Jackson (32nd), Williamson,
Dawkins

To: Judiciary, Division A

SENATE BILL NO. 2689

1 AN ACT ISSUING AN OFFICIAL APOLOGY FROM THE STATE OF
2 MISSISSIPPI FOR THE MURDER OF EMMETT TILL AND CALLING FOR
3 RECONCILIATION; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

4 WHEREAS, Emmett Louis "Bobo" Till (July 25, 1941-August 28,
5 1955) was an African-American teenager from Chicago, Illinois, who
6 was brutally murdered in the region of Mississippi known as the
7 Mississippi Delta in the small Town of Money in Leflore County;
8 and

9 WHEREAS, his murder was one of the key events that energized
10 the nascent American Civil Rights Movement. The main suspects for
11 the crime, both white men, were acquitted, but later admitted to
12 committing the crime. Till's mother had an open casket funeral to
13 let everyone see how her son had been brutally killed; and

14 WHEREAS, Emmett Till was the son of Mamie Carthan Till
15 (Bradley, Mobley) and Louis Till. His mother was born to John and
16 Alma Carthan in the small Delta Town of Webb, Mississippi. When
17 she was two years old, her family moved to Illinois. Emmett's
18 mother largely raised him on her own; she and Louis had separated
19 in 1942. In 1955, Emmett was sent for a summer stay with his
20 great uncle, Mose Wright, who lived in Money, Mississippi, a small
21 town eight miles north of Greenwood; and

22 WHEREAS, Till arrived on August 21, 1955; on August 24th he
23 joined other teenagers as they went to Bryant's Grocery and Meat
24 Market to get some candy. The teens were children of
25 sharecroppers and had been picking cotton all day. The market was
26 owned by Roy Bryant and Carolyn Bryant, and mostly catered to the
27 local sharecropper population. While in the store, Till allegedly

28 whistled at, or openly flirted with, Carolyn Bryant and this
29 action greatly angered her husband when he returned home several
30 days later from an out-of-town trip; and

31 WHEREAS, at about 2:30 a.m. on August 28th, Bryant and his
32 half-brother, J.W. Milam, kidnapped Till from his uncle's house in
33 the small cotton Town of Money, Mississippi. According to
34 witnesses, they drove him to a weathered plantation shed in
35 neighboring Sunflower County, where they brutally beat him until
36 he was unrecognizable, cut off an ear, gouged out an eye, then
37 shot him with a .45 caliber pistol before tying a 75-pound cotton
38 gin fan around Till's neck with barbed wire. This was to weight
39 down his body, which was dropped into the Tallahatchie River near
40 Glendora, another small cotton town; and

41 WHEREAS, the brothers were soon under official suspicion for
42 the boy's disappearance and were arrested August 29th after
43 spending the night with relatives living in Ruleville, just miles
44 away from where the murder took place. Both men admitted they had
45 taken the boy from his great-uncle's home but claimed they turned
46 him loose the same night; and

47 WHEREAS, after they found his body, a Tutwiler mortuary
48 assistant worked all night to prepare the body as best he could,
49 so Mamie Till Bradley could bring Emmett's body back to Chicago.
50 The Chicago funeral home had agreed not to open the casket, but
51 Mamie Bradley insisted she had a right to see her son. Mr. Raynor
52 complied. After viewing the body, she also opted to leave the
53 casket open for the funeral because she wanted people to see how
54 badly Till's body had been disfigured. News photographs of Till's
55 mutilated corpse circulated around the county, drawing intense
56 public reaction. Some reports indicate up to 50,000 people viewed
57 the body; and

58 WHEREAS, Emmett Till was buried September 6, 1955, in Burr
59 Oak Cemetery in Alsip, Illinois. The same day, Bryant and Milam
60 were indicted in Mississippi by a grand jury; and

61 WHEREAS, on September 23, 1955, the jury, made up of 12 white
62 males, acquitted both defendants. Deliberations took just 67
63 minutes; one juror said they took a "soda break" to stretch the
64 time to over an hour. The hasty acquittal outraged people
65 throughout the United States and Europe, and energized the nascent
66 Civil Rights Movement; and

67 WHEREAS, the murder of Emmett Till was felt deeply by
68 African-Americans, civil rights activists and many others. On May
69 10, 2004, the United States Department of Justice announced that
70 it was reopening the case to determine whether anyone other than
71 Milam and Bryant were involved. Although the statute of
72 limitations prevented charges being pursued under federal law,
73 they could be pursued before the state court, and the Federal
74 Bureau of Investigation and officials in Mississippi worked
75 jointly on the investigation. As no autopsy had been performed on
76 Till's body, it was exhumed from the suburban Chicago cemetery
77 where it was buried on May 31, 2005, and the Cook County coroner
78 then conducted the autopsy. The body was reburied by relatives on
79 June 4. On August 26, 2005, *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson,
80 Mississippi, announced that the exhumed body had been positively
81 identified as that of Emmett Till; and

82 WHEREAS, in 2005, a 38-mile stretch of U.S. Highway North
83 from Tutwiler to Greenwood, Mississippi, was renamed by the
84 Mississippi Legislature in honor of Emmett Till, acknowledging the
85 desire of the Mississippi Legislature to atone for this crime; and

86 WHEREAS, the murder of Emmett Till is one of the greatest
87 crimes of history and its legacy still vexes the United States and
88 the State of Mississippi. Small men took on the powers and airs
89 of tyrants and masters, and years of unpunished brutality have
90 produced a hardness of conscience. The perpetual pain, distrust
91 and bitterness of many African-Americans could be assuaged and the
92 principles espoused by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed,
93 unifying all Mississippians, if on the 51st anniversary of this

94 infamous crime, the State of Mississippi acknowledges and atones
95 for its pivotal role in the civil rights movement; NOW, THEREFORE,

96 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

97 **SECTION 1.** (1) That the State of Mississippi hereby
98 apologizes for the murder of Emmett L. Till, which occurred on
99 August 28, 1955, in Money, Mississippi, and calls for
100 reconciliation in this matter.

101 (2) That the Secretary of State shall transmit a copy of
102 this act to the surviving family of Emmett Till and to the State
103 Superintendent of Education, the Director of the State Board for
104 Community and Junior Colleges, the Commissioner of Higher
105 Education and to members of Mississippi's congressional delegation
106 for dissemination to their students and respective constituents so
107 that they may be apprised of the sense of the Legislature in this
108 matter.

109 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
110 and after July 1, 2007.