



March 4, 2016

The Honorable Christian Coomer
Chairman, House Transportation Committee
Georgia House of Representatives
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The Honorable Valerie Clark
Vice Chairman, House Transportation Committee
Georgia House of Representatives
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Dear Chairman Coomer and Vice-Chairman Clark,

It is our understanding that your committee will soon consider SB 346, which was recently passed by the State Senate. This bill, if enacted, would leave previously unknown archaeological and burial sites unprotected against potential damage caused by state-funded transportation projects. For this and other reasons, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) respectfully requests that House Transportation Committee reject the legislation in its current form.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,900 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

SB 346 would exempt state funded transportation projects of \$100 million or less from review under the Georgia Environmental Protection Act (GEPA). This means the environmental studies that are supposed to take place during the planning phase of a project will not be carried out. While designers will be able to mitigate impacts to known archaeological sites and burial places, under the proposed legislation those cultural resources that are as-yet undocumented will not be identified ahead of time. When, not if, builders inadvertently encounter such places and objects during construction, work will have to be halted until the situation is resolved. This will result in project delivery delays and increased costs to the taxpayer—precisely the outcome that the bill was written to avoid.

We know that Georgia, like the rest of the nation, has a long list of badly-needed transportation projects, and that completing such efforts is an expensive and time-consuming proposition. Eliminating the GEPA review process, however, will not result in savings of time or

money. These reviews are crucial safeguards that protect both important cultural resources and the interests of the Georgia taxpayer. We urge your committee to amend SB 346 to ensure the continuation of the review process for all transportation projects.

Sincerely,



Diane Gifford-Gonzalez, Ph.D., R.P.A.
President

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