

## **ACTION ALERT: SAVE THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES!**

Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp has announced that the Georgia Archives will be CLOSED to all public access beginning November 1, 2012. He cites as reason the requirement for a 3 % budget reduction for all state agencies. Secretary Kemp has chosen to take the required cut of \$750,000 entirely and only from the State Archives. In addition to the elimination of public access, staff reductions concerning the ten remaining staff are planned and will also be announced soon.

This action further cripples an institution that was among the first state archives established (1918), has won many awards for its programs and state-of-the-art archival facility, and has been a respected leader in archives, government records programs, and research use. Over the past decade, however, the Georgia Archives has been eviscerated by regular budget cuts, reductions in staff and reductions in public hours to 2 days a week. Now Secretary Kemp wants to eliminate even those few hours of access for Georgia's citizens, making Georgia Archives the only state archives without public access hours.

Tell the Governor, the Secretary of State and the Georgia Legislature to reverse this devastating decision. Write, call or visit and ask them to:

Restore a minimum of \$1 million to the Georgia Archives budget to return its operations to 5 days a week of public access hours and eliminate projected staff reductions.

Reverse the Secretary of State's proposed budget cuts to the Archives by November 1 to ensure uninterrupted service to the public.

When you write/call or visit, focus on a few of the points below. Put this in your own words, and use your own examples, particularly if you are a citizen of Georgia:

### **Points to make in letters/phone calls or visits:**

1. The Secretary of State was directed to reduce his budget expenditures by 3%. The entire sum needed to accomplish that has been taken from the Archives budget alone and will result in the termination of all public hours. The proposed "access by appointment...limited based on the schedule of the remaining employees" effectively denies access based on "reasonable time and place" for inspection of public records as required by Georgia law.
2. Points to make regarding the importance of access to government records for accountability and legal purposes:
  - This deprives citizens of regular and predictable access, as mandated in the Georgia Records Act, Title 50, Chapter 18, Article 4, section 70(b) of the Georgia Annotated Code that all public records "shall be open for a personal

inspection by any citizen of this state at a reasonable time and place, and those in charge of such records shall not refuse this privilege to any citizen.”

- It is contrary to the practice of government transparency by depriving citizens of predictable and ready access to the records that are essential to providing evidence of government accountability.
- It deprives citizens, as well as Georgia’s own government, of access to records needed to support due process of law. The Georgia Archives holdings have been used for a range of court cases including land claims, boundary disputes, utility right-of-way, and claims against state agencies.
- Access to records is essential to avoid costly litigation that will result if records cannot be located or accessed.

3. Points to make regarding the importance of access to government records for research purposes:

- As the Civil War Sesquicentennial begins, researchers need access to the historical record in the Georgia Archives to provide accurate, factual evidence of that experience. Many of Georgia’s governmental records were destroyed during Sherman’s March; closing the Archives similarly deprives Georgians of access to their heritage—but this time the fault does not lie with an invading army, but with Georgia officials themselves.
- The Georgia Archives holds records actively sought by genealogists and family historians; in particular, they provide essential evidence for African-American history and genealogical research not available in many private historical collections.
- The Georgia Archives has been an essential resource for environmental research and activities including efforts to reintroduce the American chestnut tree in the state and issues relating to pollution.
- The Georgia Archives has been the site of research for television and films, including the popular NBC series “Who Do You Think You Are” segments with Paula Deen and Spike Lee, as well as Emmy award-winner Ben Loeterman’s documentary “People v. Leo Frank.”

### **Governor Nathan Deal**

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**Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle**

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**Secretary of State Brian Kemp**

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- Individual Georgia legislators: find specific legislators via Society of Georgia Archivists site: <http://soga.org/involvement/legislative>

If you've signed an online petition, that's helpful, but direct contact is even more effective. For Georgians, a visit to your local legislator will have even more impact. There has been a great deal of attention on radio, newspapers, television and the Internet. In a democracy, however, nothing speaks to the governor or elected officials like direct contact from individuals. Speak up for the Georgia Archives. Write, call or plan a visit today!

Please send copies of your letter, information on contacts, or any questions to:

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