

July 21, 2023

Dear Members of the Alabama Legislature:

The American Historical Association (AHA) strongly opposes both SB1 and HB4, which would strip important supplemental appropriations recently designated for the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

The records of any government represent the heritage of its people. Unless citizens have access to those collections, however, the histories contained in them remain opaque. An early and active proponent of state archives laws in the United States, the AHA remains committed to the preservation of our heritage and to its accessibility.

The Department of Archives and History is dedicated to identifying, preserving, and providing permanent access to records that tell the story of all Alabamians. Furthermore, the department's Museum of Alabama plays a critical role in making the state's history accessible to its citizens, families, and schoolchildren.

The collections preserved in the Department of Archives and History are essential to how we learn about our individual and collective pasts. Genealogists, students, historians, journalists: all require access to these vital records to participate in the documentation and practical use of its past. Future generations rely on public officials who understand the importance of history to defend the institutions that preserve our heritage as well as programs that promote history education and public interest in the past.

Beyond the interests of historical researchers stand a wide variety of civic-minded Alabamians who depend on unfettered access to archives. The Alabama Open Records Act ensures that citizens can view public documents. Meaningful access to well-preserved archives of government activities is important to a free society and a vital aspect of government accountability. Teachers, lawyers, real estate developers, leaders of neighborhood associations—all rely not only on the records housed in the Department of Archives and History, but on the expert advice of its archivists. Stripping the department of the supplemental appropriations as proposed in SB1 and HB4 will have long-term consequences for researchers (including students) and for the ability of Alabamians to participate in democratic government.

With more than 11,000 members, the AHA is the largest membership association of professional historians in the world, representing every historical era and geographical area. Founded in 1884 and incorporated by Congress in 1889 for the promotion of historical studies, the Association provides leadership for the discipline, helps to sustain and enhance the work of historians, and promotes the critical role of historical thinking in public life. *Everything* has a history. Alabama has a history. Without adequate funding, the state's Department of Archives and History will not be able to provide services essential to civic and commercial life in the state.

Sincerely,



James Grossman
AHA Executive Director