



SICARS

Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society
Preserving Geechee/Gullah culture, land and community on Sapelo Island, Georgia.

Hog Hammock Community Foundation



For Immediate Release: **HB 273 Failed to Pass; SIHA Remains Unchanged**

April 3, 2023
Sapelo Island, GA

House Bill 273 (HB 273), which would have secured seats on the Sapelo Island Heritage Authority (SIHA) board, did not receive an agree in the House. Therefore, the bill failed to pass.

HB 273 was introduced in February without the knowledge of the descendants living on Sapelo Island. Georgia law that (Georgia Code Section 12-3-445) states SIHA has the ability to acquire, hold, and dispose of land in on Sapelo Island. The SIHA may also make contracts, including leases and rental agreements, with respect to the property it owns on Sapelo Island.

“Our NGOs working together were able to make important changes in the Senate,” said Josiah ‘Jazz’ Watts, Sapelo Descendant and Justice Strategist for One Hundred Miles. “The bill that passed the Senate would have ensured that the direct descendants of the West African peoples enslaved by Thomas Spalding had a seat at the SIHA table and that the SIHA chair would be either a state agency representative or a state-wide elected official.”

Watts and Maurice Bailey, founder of the Sapelo NGO Save our Legacy Ourself (SOLO), both traveled to the Capitol to talk to legislators about the bill. “As soon as we found out, we put together a reasonable request for how to change the language,” said Bailey. “We asked legislators to put in writing what they said they intended to do. We had the support of the Governor. We had the support of the DNR Commissioner. We had the support of the Senate. It should have been a slam dunk.”

Because the Senate amended the original bill that passed the House, HB 273 had to go back to the House for agreement. Unfortunately, Representative DeLoach agreed to only one of the changes. In the end, the House sent the bill back to the Senate after they removed the amendment regarding the SIHA chair. The Senate did not act on the bill before the end of the last legislative day.

“Despite our best efforts, the law did not change, and the structure of the SIHA remains as it was before the Legislative Session,” said Watts.

“This bill took us all by surprise,” said Willis Hillery, Sr, President of the Hog Hammock Foundation. “If the legislators would have come to us in the community first before introducing this bill, we could have worked together to make sure that the language was right from the start. Moving forward will be an opportunity for our legislators to work along with us to actually get it right from the start.”

Historically, SIHA membership has been reserved for: the Governor (SIHA chair), DNR Commissioner, Executive Director of the State Properties Commission, a resident of the community of Hog Hammock, and the Commissioner of Human Relations in the office of the Governor. The Governor has exercised his right to use this 5th spot for another resident of the Hog Hammock community, which he is enabled to do by law.

For more information, please contact:

Josiah (Jazz) Watts: (404) 200-5416

Maurice Bailey, Sr: (912) 266-4848

Willis Hillery, Sr: (912) 270-4089
