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Georgia Bill Would Leave Savannah Exposed to Hurricane Threat

Proposed legislation would prevent Peach State cities from strengthening building codes for safety reasons

Savannah, GA – Legislation currently being considered by the Georgia State Senate – [House Bill 876](#) – would, if signed into law, prevent cities like Savannah from enacting local measures to strengthen their building codes, whether it be for fire or safety reasons or ecological concerns.

The bill, which recently passed the Georgia House of Representatives and cleared the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, would also rescind the efforts of cities like [Sandy Springs](#) and [Dunwoody](#), which previously passed ordinances to strengthen their codes by limiting the use of combustible materials in certain building elements with the aim of providing increased quality, sustainability, durability and longevity.

As the start of the 2018 Atlantic hurricane season looms, and the need for local decision-making authority in terms of addressing weather concerns becomes more apparent, Build with Strength, a coalition dedicated to strengthening the nation's building codes, along with local leaders throughout Georgia worried about the limiting effects of this bill, are calling on the Georgia State Senate to reject the legislation.

"Our local lawmakers need the flexibility to decide what's best for our community's construction and development needs, especially given our proximity to the ocean," said architect and former Georgia State Senator Eric Johnson (R-1). "Savannah has been battered by flooding and high winds the last couple years – first from Hurricane Matthew then Hurricane Irma – bringing along mold and costly cleanups. If it's decided that stronger local codes would help prevent high reconstruction costs, we should be allowed to put them in place."

A calculation developed by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Concrete Sustainability Hub called [the Break-Even Mitigation Percentage \(BEMP\)](#) confirms the importance of using resilient construction techniques in regions prone to extreme weather events and shows how investment can be cost effective. According to the researchers, initial investment in mitigation is the key to a sound structure. For a building in Savannah, Georgia, an initial hazard mitigation investment of \$330,000 on top of a \$10 million investment would mitigate enough storm damage over the structure's lifetime to pay for itself.

"Structures in coastal areas states like Florida and Georgia are prone to damage from high winds and hurricanes," said Jeremy Gregory, executive director of the MIT CSHub [in an MIT News story](#). "Through previous [case studies](#) we've demonstrated that investing in more hazard-

resistant residential construction in some locations can be very cost-effective, especially in coastal states where the impact of hurricanes can have devastating economic effects.”

Earlier this month, representatives from Build with Strength, State Senator Albers (R-56), along with Sandy Springs’ Mayor Rusty Paul and Fire Chief Keith Sanders, and P.E. Steve Skalko of Macon, [addressed the press](#) in Sandy Springs, Georgia, in opposition to the legislation.

The desire to strengthen local building codes isn’t limited to Dunwoody and Sandy Springs. According to [polling conducted in September 2016](#), Georgia voters are highly supportive of Sandy Springs’ ordinance (96% support), and were in favor of their own city passing similar regulations by overwhelming margins (94% support). The poll of 400 registered voters living in Georgia was commissioned by Build with Strength.

Learn more at www.buildwithstrength.com.

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