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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

SENATE RESOLUTION

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF MICHAEL VAN LEESTEN

Introduced By: Senators Ruggerio, Metts, and Goodwin

Date Introduced: February 11, 2020

Referred To: Recommended for Immediate Consideration

1 WHEREAS, Michael Van Leesten, a Rhode Island Civil Rights icon and a successful
2 businessman and devoted public servant, passed away on August 23, 2019; and

3 WHEREAS, Mr. Van Leesten was a Hope High School and Rhode Island College
4 graduate, where he was a star basketball player. After graduating college in 1965, Mr. Van
5 Leesten became active in the civil rights community, and together with six other courageous
6 students, participated in civil rights and voter registration activities in Alabama and Mississippi at
7 a time when doing so put one's life in great jeopardy; and

8 WHEREAS, Mr. Van Leesten spent his entire life in service to the public and in pursuant
9 of justice for all, especially those who never received the promises made to all Americans in the
10 Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution; and

11 WHEREAS, Mr. Van Leesten was one of the founders, and had served as the Chief
12 Executive Officer of the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Rhode Island (OIC), an
13 organization that provides job training and career counseling to underrepresented groups within
14 American society and the business community; and

15 WHEREAS, Mr. Van Leesten also served as an Executive Assistant to the Chairman of
16 the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation in Connecticut and assisted with the development of the
17 Foxwoods Resort Casino. Additionally, he served as Director of the Department of Planning and
18 Development for the City of Providence, as Chairman of the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage
19 Finance Corporation, and has held leadership positions within the NAACP, Urban League, the
20 Black Repertory Company, and the Black Heritage Society; and

1 WHEREAS, Mr. Van Leesten will long be remembered by his many friends and admirers
2 for his tireless advocacy in support of civil rights and equality. He was a courageous man, a man
3 of deep personal conviction and integrity, and a loving person who cared deeply about others,
4 especially those living on the margins of American society; now, therefore be it

5 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
6 hereby expresses its deepest condolences on the passing of Mr. Michael Van Leesten; and be it
7 further

8 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
9 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Rhode Island NAACP and the
10 Opportunities Industrialization Center of Rhode Island.

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