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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

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SENATE RESOLUTION

EXPRESSING DEEPEST CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF THE HONORABLE  
JOHN LEWIS

Introduced By: Senators Metts, Ruggerio, McCaffrey, and Goodwin

Date Introduced: December 17, 2020

Referred To: Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar

1           WHEREAS, The Honorable John Lewis, United States Congressman, courageous civil  
2 rights leader, and American hero, passed away on July 17, 2020. Congressman Lewis was the  
3 husband of the late Lillian Miles and together they had one son, John-Miles Lewis; and

4           WHEREAS, John Lewis was born on February 21, 1940, near Troy, Alabama, the third  
5 of ten children born into a poor sharecropper family. As a young man Lewis and his family faced  
6 racism and segregation on a daily basis. He was inspired at a young age to fight for equality and a  
7 public service career after following the Montgomery Bus Boycott and meeting Rosa Parks and  
8 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., before reaching the age of eighteen; and

9           WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis graduated from the American Baptist Theological Seminary in  
10 Nashville, and was ordained as a Baptist Minister. He went on to attend Fisk University where he  
11 earned a bachelor's degree in religion and philosophy. After graduating, he proceeded to embark  
12 on a public service career that changed our nation and began the process, one that continues  
13 today, of living up to the promises made in the Declaration of Independence; and

14           WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis began his civil rights activism in Nashville organizing sit-ins at  
15 segregated lunch counters. He was arrested and jailed many times, but eventually succeeded  
16 when all lunch counters in downtown Nashville were desegregated. In 1961, Mr. Lewis was one  
17 of the thirteen original Freedom Riders, a group of courageous young people determined to ride  
18 in integrated buses from Washington D.C., to New Orleans, to fulfill a 1960 United States  
19 Supreme Court decision that declared segregated interstate bus travel to be unconstitutional. For

1 his efforts with the Freedom Riders, Mr. Lewis was jailed for forty days in the Mississippi State  
2 Penitentiary, and he and his colleagues were beaten in numerous places throughout the South. By  
3 1963, Mr. Lewis had been arrested twenty-four times for his activities in support of equal justice;  
4 and

5 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis was a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating  
6 Committee (SNCC), and in 1963 was chosen to serve as its Chairman, a position he held until  
7 1966. During his tenure, the SNCC opened Freedom Schools and conducted voter registration  
8 efforts in Selma, Alabama where he and other Civil Rights activists, on March 7, 1965, were  
9 brutally beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge by Alabama State Troopers in an event that  
10 shocked, horrified and angered the nation and came to be known as "Bloody Sunday." Mr. Lewis  
11 had his skull fractured and bore scars from this incident for the rest of his life; and

12 WHEREAS, From 1966 to 1986, Mr. Lewis would go on to serve in a myriad of public  
13 service positions including Director of the Voter Education Project (VEP), which enrolled four  
14 million minority voters under his guidance. He then proceeded to serve in President Carter's  
15 administration before he resigned to run for an at-large seat on the Atlanta City Council, an  
16 election he won; and

17 WHEREAS, In 1986, Mr. Lewis was elected to serve in the United States House of  
18 Representatives, representing the Atlanta metropolitan area. He was re-elected sixteen times,  
19 serving until his passing on July 17, 2020. He was a respected leader within the Democratic  
20 Party, serving as a Chief Deputy Whip from 1991 to 2003, and as a Senior Chief Deputy Whip  
21 from 2003 to his passing. Throughout his tenure in the United States House of Representatives he  
22 was an eloquent and tireless fighter for human rights across the globe and in support of equality  
23 for all Americans. He was a passionate advocate in support of programs that have provided  
24 opportunities and hope to those Americans living on the margins of society, and to eliminate all  
25 forms of discrimination and inequality in American life; and

26 WHEREAS, Congressman Lewis has received many honors in recognition of his service  
27 to our nation. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama  
28 in 2011. Other important awards include the Wallenberg Medal from the University of Michigan,  
29 the Four Freedoms Award, the Profile in Courage Award from the John F. Kennedy Library  
30 Foundation, the Spingarn Medal from the NAACP, the John Heinz Award, the Dole Leadership  
31 Prize from the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, and the first LBJ Liberty and Justice For All  
32 Award, given by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation; now, therefore be it

33 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby expresses its deepest  
34 condolences on the passing of the Honorable United States Congressman John Lewis; and be it

1 further

2           RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
3 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the President of the United States, Donald J.  
4 Trump, Governor Gina M. Raimondo, United States House of Representatives Speaker Nancy  
5 Pelosi, and United States Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

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