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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Nathaniel "Nate" Thomas, Ph.D., who passed away on November 7, 2020; and

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WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas was born in Mound Bayou, Mississippi on February 26, 1936; he came to Chicago as a young child; he graduated from Wendell Phillips High School in 1953, and he had recently served as the president of the alumni association; he served in the U.S. Marines, where he earned the rank of corporal and performed as the bass singer with the Four Palms; he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Computer Technology, with a minor in Business Administration, from Roosevelt University; he received his Master of Arts in Vocational Guidance from Roosevelt University; he earned his Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from LaSalle University; and

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WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas came to the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in 1965, where he began his career at the campus computer center; he was promoted to serve as assistant director of Cooperative Education, and he helped IIT receive a \$25,000 grant from General Electric (GE) for minorities in engineering in 1973; he used the funds from GE to establish a pre-engineering program on campus called Early Identification

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1 (Early ID) beginning in 1974, which was a summer-long program
2 to bring high-potential students from Chicago area high
3 schools to campus and expose them to the engineering
4 profession; his efforts led to 20% of those students later
5 attending IIT, establishing Early ID as a novel recruitment
6 strategy; he was promoted to director of Admissions; he
7 oversaw increasing undergraduate enrollment to 801 freshmen,
8 which included a 433% increase in minority enrollment; and

9 WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas served as executive director for the
10 Committee for Institutional Cooperation and Midwest Programs
11 for Minorities in Engineering from 1977 to 1980; and

12 WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas returned to the Illinois Institute of
13 Technology and served as the head of Minority Affairs; he
14 oversaw the graduation of 97 Black engineers from IIT in 1982,
15 the highest in the country regardless of the size of the
16 university; he retired as assistant vice president of External
17 Affairs in 1988; over the course of his illustrious career at
18 IIT, he oversaw the recruitment of hundreds of talented Black
19 and Latinx students to IIT, raised hundreds of thousands of
20 dollars for scholarships, connected students to summer jobs
21 and long-term employment, and provided expensive graphing
22 calculators until students could afford their own; under his
23 leadership, minority graduates of IIT became engineers,
24 doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, architects, accountants,

1 business managers, and ministers; and

2 WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas also served as the vice chancellor of
3 Student Services for the City Colleges of Chicago; and

4 WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas received a number of accolades during
5 his career, including the Reginald H. Jones Distinguished
6 Service Award by the National Action Council for Minorities in
7 Engineering in 1983 and the National Society of Black
8 Engineers (NSBE) Golden Torch Legacy Award at the
9 organization's national convention in 2011; he was honored
10 with a Nate Thomas Tribute, a three-day event with over 200
11 guests, on the Illinois Institute of Technology campus in
12 2009; he became the namesake of the Nate Thomas Legacy
13 Scholarship in 2015; and

14 WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas was a pioneer of diversity, equity,
15 and inclusion; he made an indelible impact on the lives of
16 hundreds of students throughout his career and enriched the
17 STEM workforce for generations to come; and

18 WHEREAS, Dr. Thomas was preceded in death by his parents,
19 Aaron and Marie Thomas; his daughter, Taunda Thomas; and his
20 brothers, Aaron (Brown) Thomas and Jerry Thomas; and

21 WHEREAS, At the time of his death, Dr. Thomas was survived

1 by his children, Rhonda Thomas, Barbara (BJ) Thomas, Dwayne
2 Thomas, Jennifer Chalmers, and Susan Thomas Smith; 12
3 grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; four nieces; two
4 nephews; and a host of friends, relatives, and mentees;
5 therefore, be it

6 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL
7 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
8 Nathaniel "Nate" Thomas, Ph.D., and extend our sincere
9 condolences to his family, friends, and all who knew and loved
10 him; and be it further

11 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
12 presented to the family of Dr. Thomas as an expression of our
13 deepest sympathy.