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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate of the 102nd General Assembly of the State of Illinois learned with great sadness of the death of their colleague and friend, Senator Scott Michael Bennett, on December 9, 2022; and

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WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett was born on July 16, 1977 to Dr. Robert and Barbara Bennett in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where his father was stationed in the U.S. Army; when he was an infant, the family moved to Gibson City, where five generations of his family have worked on their family farm, which is something he cherished; he graduated from Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School in 1995 and then studied History at Illinois State University, graduating in 1998; he then attended law school at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, graduating in 2002; and

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WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett joined the Senate in 2015 as the unanimous choice to fill the vacancy created when Michael W. Frerichs was sworn in as the Illinois State Treasurer after serving the 52nd District for eight years; and

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WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett dedicated his life to public service and giving back to his community; he first earned an internship at the White House, where he served the Clinton

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1 Administration in the Office of Presidential Gifts and met his
2 wife, Stacy Meredith, who had been assigned to the same
3 office; they entertained one another with imagined back
4 stories of curious global and domestic gifts; and

5 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett started his career as a prosecutor
6 for the City of Chicago and also worked for the Democratic
7 National Committee in Washington, D.C.; and

8 WHEREAS, Though Sen. Bennett could have pursued a
9 high-paying career in corporate law, he longed to return to
10 his roots and the community he treasured; he returned to
11 central Illinois to work as an assistant state's attorney in
12 Bloomington-Normal and then in Champaign-Urbana; and

13 WHEREAS, The first piece of legislation Sen. Bennett filed
14 was to protect central Illinois' water supply by preserving
15 the quality of drinking water in the Mahomet Aquifer, which
16 serves as the primary water supply for 15 counties across
17 central Illinois, including Champaign and Vermilion counties;
18 he believed that the aquifer served as a lifeline for the
19 region and made it his mission to protect this important
20 resource for the sake of the region's children and future
21 generations to come; he continuously worked with a bipartisan
22 coalition of legislators to add safeguards to protect this
23 valuable resource; and

1 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett leaned on his experience in the
2 courtroom to champion legislation to permit courts to allow
3 comfort canines in courtrooms to assist children or people
4 with intellectual disabilities who have to testify in court on
5 sexual assault cases; he believed that the use of dogs in the
6 courtroom can help bring a major change in how we can meet the
7 emotional needs of those involved in the criminal justice
8 system; and

9 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett partnered with Treasurer Frerichs to
10 establish the Illinois Achieving Better Life Expectancy Act,
11 known as the ABLE Act, to promote financial security for
12 children and loved ones living with disabilities; the goal of
13 the program is to assist individuals and families in saving
14 money to cover expenses for people with disabilities; and

15 WHEREAS, During the budget impasse in 2015, Sen. Bennett
16 and his family filed paperwork to forgo his pay until there was
17 a budget in place to protect essential programs in Illinois;
18 the Bennett family stood in solidarity with the hard working
19 men and women in their community who provided essential
20 services to our most vulnerable populations, and they believed
21 it was unjust for elected officials to continue to take home
22 their pay while in-home child care providers struggled to keep
23 their doors open and seniors were forced to choose between

1 picking up their prescriptions or keeping their lights on at
2 night; he did not accept a paycheck for more than six months;
3 and

4 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett fought to provide Illinois' students
5 with the opportunity to be successful as the chair of the
6 Senate's Higher Education Committee for the last two years; he
7 worked to secure resources for the University of Illinois
8 Urbana-Champaign, Parkland College, Danville Community
9 College, and all of the State's higher education facilities by
10 advocating for additional funding for need-based tuition
11 assistance, lowering tuition costs and fees, and preventing
12 licensing boards from denying and revoking or suspending
13 individual professional licenses due to student loan default
14 in Illinois; and

15 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett introduced the Know Before You Owe
16 Private Education Loan Act, which requires private lenders to
17 confirm with a potential borrower's school that the student's
18 tuition, housing, and other costs are not covered by other
19 sources of financial aid to ensure students and their families
20 have clear information when weighing their loan options; and

21 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked to combat campus sexual
22 violence and championed the Preventing Sexual Violence on
23 Campus Act, which provided a road map to existing federal

1 requirements and set standards to prevent and respond to
2 sexual violence; his goal was to end campus assault, but if an
3 assault occurred, he wanted to ensure that there were clear
4 and concise guidelines to give survivors of sexual assault a
5 comprehensive path to report crimes and be notified of their
6 rights; and

7 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked to increase civic
8 participation and engage more citizens in the democratic
9 process by supporting automatic voter registration and routine
10 voter registration drives; he also worked to encourage more
11 young people to be involved in government through mentorship
12 and internship opportunities for college and high school
13 students, through regular visits to local schools to educate
14 students on different methods to voice their concerns and
15 provide input on the vital matters that impact our
16 communities, and by always being willing to have candid
17 conversations with college clubs and groups or young people
18 who contacted his office; and

19 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett's love for his family farm shined
20 through the active role he played as the chair of the
21 Agriculture Committee for two years; he even sought a
22 commercial driver's license so he could haul grain in a
23 semi-truck to the area grain elevator from his family's
24 centennial farm during harvest; he could be found returning

1 calls, participating in weekly team meeting calls, negotiating
2 legislation, and much more in the name of service to the
3 constituents of the 52nd District while waiting for the truck
4 to be loaded; and

5 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett recognized the stressors placed on
6 farmers and farm families and partnered with SIU School of
7 Medicine's Center for Rural Health and Social Services
8 Development and the Illinois Department of Agriculture to
9 introduce a hotline to connect farmers to health professionals
10 and services for additional support through the Farm Family
11 Resource Initiative; and

12 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett partnered with former Illinois
13 Department of Agriculture Director John Sullivan to address
14 the issue of farm chemical runoff polluting Illinois waterways
15 because he believed the State needed to make significant water
16 quality improvement to protect our quality of life for
17 generations to come; and

18 WHEREAS, To help alleviate the shortage of agriculture
19 science educators, Sen. Bennett championed an initiative to
20 create a hands-on agriculture teacher training program in
21 Illinois high schools for those interested in studying to
22 teach agriculture; he believed that creating a pre-service
23 teacher training program to give prospective agriculture

1 students the fundamentals they need to succeed will help to
2 ensure that the next generation of family farmers will keep
3 the industry strong for years to come; he later received the
4 Jim Guilinger Legislative Award from the Illinois Leadership
5 Council for Agricultural Education for his support of
6 agricultural education and Future Farmers of America student
7 programs; and

8 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett's experience in the courtroom gave
9 the Senate a unique and cherished perspective that he utilized
10 as the chair of the Criminal Law Committee for two years; he
11 emphasized the importance he placed on providing minors who
12 experienced the most egregious crimes against them with the
13 tools to seek justice when they are ready by removing the
14 statute of limitations for certain sex crimes against minors;
15 he believed that survivors of these horrific crimes should not
16 be forced to seek justice before they are ready to do so; and

17 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked with State agencies and local
18 leaders to acquire a Child's Advocacy Center in Vermilion
19 County to provide minors with a comforting, kid-friendly
20 environment; prior to that, Vermilion County had been one of
21 only four counties in the State that did not have one; he
22 valued the opportunity to serve as the vice-president of the
23 board of directors for the facility; and

1 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett believed in the spirit of
2 bipartisanship and worked on legislation with his uncle, State
3 Representative Tom Bennett, to ensure that materials on SIDS
4 prevention provided to parents include information from the
5 American Academy of Pediatrics or a statewide or nationally
6 recognized SIDS or medical association; he made it his goal to
7 find at least one piece of legislation that he could work on
8 with Rep. Bennett every General Assembly; and

9 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett never forgot the importance of our
10 nation's veterans and worked with now retired State
11 Representative Chad Hays to rededicate a lost grave marker
12 that was discovered to belong to Clyde E. Maham, a World War I
13 veteran who was buried at Maplewood Cemetery in Rantoul; he
14 believed that whether a veteran's sacrifices were made during
15 World War I or are currently being made across the globe, it is
16 important to honor the dedication and sacrifices the veterans
17 have made to our great nation; and

18 WHEREAS, To support women in Illinois, Sen. Bennett voted
19 to institute a federal constitutional provision that expressly
20 guarantees equal rights to women and men by championing Senate
21 Joint Resolution Constitutional Amendment 4, which would have
22 ratified the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the United States
23 Constitution; he believed ratifying the ERA is not merely
24 symbolic or only a woman's issue and that it is a necessary

1 measure for Illinois to take to guarantee equality under the
2 law for both men and women; and

3 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett believed in protecting women's
4 reproductive health care and bodily autonomy since these are
5 the most basic and fundamental human rights; he supported a
6 number of measures to ensure Illinois has laws on the books to
7 protect the health and well-being of women in Illinois; and

8 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked diligently to prevent
9 groundwater contaminated at Illinois coal ash dump sites by
10 championing a bipartisan initiative with area legislators; he
11 believed that Illinois cannot afford to stand by while toxic
12 waste threatens our State's valuable water resources
13 indefinitely; during the passage of the legislation, he coined
14 the term Team Coal Ash to commemorate the friendships formed
15 during the tough negotiations and distributed coal stress
16 balls to the team after the bill's passage; he later received
17 the Illinois Environmental Councils' Milestone Achievement
18 Award and the Prairie Rivers Network's Outstanding Public
19 Servant Award for his efforts in passing historic coal ash
20 regulations into law that year; and

21 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked with his colleagues to
22 provide Illinois workers with a living wage; he believed that
23 employees deserve a fair wage that respects the work they do in

1 the service to our community and that Illinois' hardest
2 workers should be compensated with a wage that allows them to
3 live their lives with dignity, fairness, and stability; and

4 WHEREAS, After years of work, Sen. Bennett was able to
5 secure a Danville casino to help spur growth in the region and
6 create good-paying jobs for Vermilion County residents; he was
7 looking forward to the ribbon cutting of the casino and
8 witnessing the economic impact it would have on Danville; and

9 WHEREAS, During the unfortunate COVID-19 pandemic, Sen.
10 Bennett worked to keep constituents safe by educating people
11 on the dangers of exposure, supporting and providing
12 information about local food pantries and State resources
13 available to assist, reading evening bedtime stories as a
14 celebrity reader, assisting constituents in securing
15 unemployment benefits, distributing personal protective
16 equipment to first responders, supporting local business
17 owners, and encouraging residents to wear masks and get
18 vaccinated once they were made available; and

19 WHEREAS, To improve transparency around prescription drug
20 costs, Sen. Bennett pushed a bill requiring pharmacies to post
21 a notice informing consumers that they may request current
22 pharmacy retail prices at the point of sale to ensure that the
23 drug industry is held accountable and that residents receive

1 the pricing information they deserve to make informed
2 decisions; and

3 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked diligently to support
4 downstate schools across central Illinois by ensuring that
5 there was a bipartisan funding formula in place that supported
6 all of our State's children; he helped institute a funding
7 formula that guarantees that the quality of a child's
8 education will not be based on their ZIP code and funds schools
9 the right way to help lower property tax bills; and

10 WHEREAS, To raise awareness and help improve mental health
11 among young adults and middle school students, Sen. Bennett
12 sponsored legislation that requires school districts to
13 provide contact information for the National Suicide
14 Prevention Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line on student
15 identification cards to ensure this resource is available to
16 help students who may be struggling; he believed printing this
17 information on student ID cards meant the hotline number is
18 always close at hand and, more importantly, can be used as a
19 lifeline for children and their families; and

20 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett worked with law enforcement and his
21 colleagues in the House and Senate to pass legislation to
22 improve the criminal justice system by passing a package of
23 bills that were aimed at keeping law enforcement officials

1 safe by creating grant opportunities and instituting ways to
2 recruit, hire, and retain the best of our law enforcement
3 officers to keep communities safe; and

4 WHEREAS, Most recently, Sen. Bennett served as a central
5 figure in recent SAFE-T Act changes; he understood the
6 importance of presuming innocence for individuals before being
7 proven guilty, supporting police, and keeping violent
8 criminals out of our neighborhoods; his goal remained to
9 ensure that the Illinois' pretrial system is equitable and
10 that everyone is treated equally regardless of their financial
11 status; he believed it was pertinent to bring together a
12 diverse group of individuals to create a comprehensive plan
13 that maintains the intent of the Pretrial Fairness Act while
14 ensuring our court systems have the tools they need to serve
15 their communities; he was proud of the efforts to improve the
16 consistency within the law; and

17 WHEREAS, During his time in office, Sen. Bennett
18 appreciated the honor of participating in the annual Wreaths
19 Across America ceremony at Danville National Cemetery because
20 he believed in the importance of the community coming together
21 to celebrate the lives of our fallen soldiers; at this year's
22 ceremony and going forward, the organization pledged to lay a
23 wreath to memorialize him, and he is the only non-veteran to
24 receive this great honor; and

1 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett secured over \$25.9 million for
2 cities and municipalities in his district to upgrade community
3 parks, restore historical landmarks, improve local roads, and
4 create accessibility to buildings; he consistently advocated
5 for all of his district, including securing over 60 projects
6 for schools, foundations, cities, not-for-profits, parks,
7 libraries, and many others; and

8 WHEREAS, The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
9 the State's flagship university, is located in what was Sen.
10 Bennett's district; while in office, he secured more than \$50
11 million in additional spending for the University of Illinois,
12 including an additional \$500 million for the Discovery
13 Partners Institute, which is an economic incubator for the
14 State; and

15 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett served on a number of boards and
16 task forces, including the Mahomet Aquifer Task Force, the
17 Illinois Supreme Court's Pretrial Practices Commission,
18 Governor JB Pritzker's Growing Our Agricultural Economy
19 Committee, the Access to Voting for Persons with Disabilities
20 Advisory Task Force, the Commission on Equitable Public
21 University Funding, the Midwestern Higher Education
22 Commission, and the State Procurement Task Force; and

1 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett hosted a number of annual collection
2 drives to benefit the Vermilion County community; one such
3 event was his community dictionary drive to benefit Danville
4 Area Community College's Department of Corrections program,
5 which rehabilitates incarcerated men participating in
6 prison-based education programs; he also hosted warm sock
7 drives to boost supplies at local shelters during the cold
8 winter months; and

9 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett was always ready to help and support
10 community organizations and address shortages and constituent
11 needs; he hosted blood drives and collected canned foods to
12 help food pantries, cell phones to help survivors of domestic
13 violence and to help military personnel, cards for seniors and
14 veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, winter hygiene product
15 drives for local soup kitchens, and donations for Ukrainian
16 families in Westville, among other needs; and

17 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett loved when school groups, interns,
18 or constituents would stop by his office in Springfield; he
19 cherished the opportunity to provide visitors with an in-depth
20 tour of the State Capitol, whose deep history he loved; those
21 fortunate enough to receive this tour would often learn new
22 historical facts and tidbits and hear his latest stories; and

23 WHEREAS, As a former staff member himself, Sen. Bennett

1 was often found at the back of the Senate chamber taking the
2 time to get to know staff members and sharing funny anecdotes;
3 he always valued the time and energy staff put into their work
4 and treated his staff as family; he would make a special effort
5 to look for ways to show his appreciation; he was beloved by
6 staff and will be greatly missed by them; and

7 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett hosted summer book club programs for
8 children in the community, had a steady rotation of college
9 and high school interns, and regularly visited area schools
10 and college classes to engage more students in the State's
11 legislative process because he genuinely believed that the
12 State's children could become great leaders in our State and
13 nation; he adored hearing from or about former interns and
14 staff members who achieved their career and education goals;
15 and

16 WHEREAS, During his tenure as a legislator, Sen. Bennett
17 partnered with area organizations to sponsor expungement and
18 record-sealing summits to provide full-service assistance to
19 Champaign residents with application, preparation, and filing
20 for adult and juvenile criminal record expungement and sealing
21 along with other relief because he wanted to give people the
22 opportunity to be successful; and

23 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett was a fierce advocate and was well

1 known by all for his humor and wit, which was an innate talent
2 he used as a tool to heal and unite by putting his audience at
3 ease and creating space for connection; he treasured
4 relationships, from his constituents and colleagues to his
5 family and friends, and all knew that no matter the
6 relationship he genuinely cared; and

7 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett's absence has left a big Scott
8 Bennett-sized hole in our hearts forever; we can honor him by
9 taking the time to find common ground, being kind to our
10 neighbors, and doing our best to leave the world a brighter and
11 more compassionate place; and

12 WHEREAS, Sen. Bennett prioritized service above self and
13 deeply cared for the 52nd State Senate District; however, his
14 greatest love was for his family, his wife of 20 years, Stacy,
15 and his children, Sam and Emma, who served as his rock and
16 heart in every action he took; he would often forgo staying in
17 Springfield after long session days to go home and be near his
18 family; and

19 WHEREAS, Dr. Stacy Bennett, who honored Sen. Bennett's
20 legacy by completing the remainder of his term in the 102nd
21 General Assembly, served as his sounding board, his political
22 strategist, and the love of his life; she helped him stay
23 grounded and provided him with support to help him better

1 represent the diverse needs of the residents of the 52nd
2 District; therefore, be it

3 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL
4 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
5 Senator Scott Bennett, our friend and colleague, who served
6 the people of the State of Illinois with honor and distinction
7 and exemplified the highest standards; and be it further

8 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
9 presented to the family of Sen. Bennett as an expression of our
10 sincerest condolences for the loss of their loved one and our
11 friend.