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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

SENATE RESOLUTION

CONGRATULATING ROSANNE SOMERSON, PRESIDENT OF THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN (RISD), ON HER FORTHCOMING RETIREMENT AND HONORING HER FOR A LIFETIME OF SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS AS AN ARTIST AND PUBLIC SERVANT

Introduced By: Senator Dominick J. Ruggiero

Date Introduced: June 23, 2021

Referred To: Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar

1 WHEREAS, Rosanne Somerson was born in Philadelphia and attended the Rhode Island
2 School of Design where she attained a B.F.A. degree in Industrial Design in 1976. While at RISD
3 she took a semester off to attend the full-time furniture making workshops at Peter's Valley
4 Craftsmen (Peter's Valley School of Craft). After graduation, Ms. Somerson worked as a
5 correspondent for Fine Woodworking Magazine, and has pursued her own furniture-making
6 practice, creating highly honored work that has been shown in prominent museums such as the
7 Louvre's Musee des Arts Decoratifs, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Museum of
8 Fine Arts Boston and the RISD Museum; and

9 WHEREAS, Ms. Somerson began her distinguished public service career teaching
10 woodworking at the Harvard Extension School from 1977 to 1978, and at the Boston
11 Architectural Center in 1981. Ms. Somerson joined the Rhode Island School of Design faculty in
12 1985, teaching furniture design. In 1995 she became the first leader of RISD's new Furniture
13 Design department, helping to forge the department's reputation as being a leader in its field; and

14 WHEREAS, Ms. Somerson served as RISD's Interim Associate Provost for Academic
15 Affairs from 2005 to 2007, as Interim Provost from 2011 to 2012 and as Provost from 2012 to
16 2013. After an international search, she emerged as the top candidate for President and was
17 appointed the college's 17th President by the Rhode Island School of Design Board of Trustees on
18 February 18, 2015; and

1 WHEREAS, Ms. Somerson has been fully committed to expanding equity, diversity and
2 access across all spectrums of the RISD campus and community. As president she developed,
3 with the faculty and students, RISD’s first Social Equity and Inclusion Action Plan and has made
4 RISD an even more welcoming and accepting place of learning and working for all faculty,
5 students, administrators and support staff; and

6 WHEREAS, As President of the Rhode Island School of Design, Ms. Somerson was a
7 fierce and tireless advocate for the arts and RISD’s distinctive studio-based education principles.
8 She also worked hard to develop a culture of philanthropy at RISD. Thanks to her exemplary
9 leadership and guidance, during her tenure, RISD increased support for scholarships, financial aid
10 and other important priorities. These efforts led to the largest fundraising gains in RISD’s history;
11 and

12 WHEREAS, President Somerson has received numerous honors throughout her esteemed
13 career. An interview with her is included in the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art Oral
14 History Project, and she has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. She
15 also was the recipient of the James Renwick Alliance Distinguished Crafts Educator Award, and
16 the 2019 Pell Award for Outstanding Leadership in the Arts; now, therefore be it

17 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby congratulates Ms.
18 Rosanne Somerson on her forthcoming retirement as the President of the Rhode Island School of
19 Design and honoring her for a lifetime of significant achievements as an artist and public servant;
20 and be it further

21 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
22 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Ms. Rosanne Somerson, President of the Rhode
23 Island School of Design.

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