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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

SENATE RESOLUTION

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF HOWARD JEFFREY MELISH, ESQ.

Introduced By: Senators Sosnowski, Felag, and McCaffrey

Date Introduced: March 01, 2022

Referred To: Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar

1 WHEREAS, It is with deep sadness that this Senate has learned of the passing of Jeff
2 Melish of Wakefield, Rhode Island. He was the husband of Joanne Pope Melish for forty-two
3 years and a distinguished attorney; and

4 WHEREAS, Mr. Melish was born in Brooklyn, New York, and until the age of eleven
5 had lived in the rectory of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, where his grandfather and father
6 served as rectors. He was the son of the late Reverend William Howard Melish, a supporter of the
7 Social Gospel, and Mary Jane Melish, an artist and social justice activist. His parents were
8 prominent civil rights and peace advocates who helped to racially integrate Brooklyn Heights in
9 the 1950s. The Melish Family's support for international peace and friendship with the Soviet
10 Union earned the ire of United States Senator Joe McCarthy. A court case involving the Melish
11 Family reached the United States Supreme Court and famed playwright Arthur Miller wrote a
12 short story "Father and Son" about the Melish case; and

13 WHEREAS, Aside from politics, Jeff Melish, was also passionate about basketball. He
14 would practice daily for hours and was good enough to play against Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in high
15 school and had earned a scholarship to play basketball at Furman College. The call of politics
16 lured him back to New York City, where he became a leader of the Students for a Democratic
17 Society and the anti-war movement. He graduated from New York University in 1971 with a
18 degree in political science and history; and

19 WHEREAS, In 1972, after teaching for a year at the Brooklyn Friends School, Mr.
20 Melish moved to South Kingstown with his first wife, Carole Costanza. In 1973, he attained an

1 M.A. degree in Elementary Education from the University of Rhode Island and taught second and
2 third grade at Moses Brown and Peace Dale Elementary Schools for the next eight years; and

3 WHEREAS, In 1979, Mr. Melish met his soul mate, historian Joanne Pope Melish, and
4 later proceeded to attain a J.D. in 1984 from the New England School of Law, where he attended
5 class at night while working full-time during the day; and

6 WHEREAS, For the next thirty-seven years, Mr. Melish practiced law and worked
7 tirelessly in defense of civil liberties and civil rights. He was a social justice advocate who served
8 for more than three decades as an ACLU attorney and for many years as a member of the
9 ACLU's Board of Directors. He was also an accomplished and well-respected family law and
10 disability/children's rights attorney, and served many of the region's nonprofits and social service
11 agencies as an on-call lawyer; and

12 WHEREAS, Mr. Melish also volunteered much of his free time serving on the boards of
13 the Johnnycake Center for Hope, South County Community Action, and ProChange Behavior
14 Systems, where he worked diligently to expand access to safe and quality housing for the poor,
15 providing needed food for and care for families, and attaining an inclusive education system for
16 all youngsters, including different kinds of learners. He also worked with Habitat for Humanity
17 and was a member of the South Kingstown Immigration Task Force; and

18 WHEREAS, Mr. Melish leaves behind his wife, Joanne, his children, Rachel Zinkand,
19 Jennifer Melish, Matthew Johnson, Tara Melish and foster daughter Gabrielle Prochaska, his
20 brothers John and Bill Melish, and seven grandchildren; now, therefore be it

21 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby expresses its deepest
22 condolences on the passing of Jeff Melish; and be it further

23 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
24 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Mrs. Joanne Pope Melish and Family.

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