

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 169

Commending Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 13, 2026

WHEREAS, Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D., has served with distinction as president of Richard Bland College since July 2012, providing visionary, steady, and transformational leadership to the Commonwealth's only public, residential two-year college; and

WHEREAS, a native of Wise County, Dr. Sydow began her career as an English professor at Southwest Virginia Community College in Richlands; over the course of 13 years in the Virginia Community College System, she served as a dean, vice president, and acting president of Mountain Empire Community College; and

WHEREAS, in 2000, Dr. Sydow was selected as president of Onondaga Community College in the State University of New York system, where she oversaw a \$100 million operating budget, secured funding for \$125 million in new construction, and served 30,000 students annually; and

WHEREAS, during Dr. Sydow's 14-year presidency, Richard Bland College experienced sustained institutional growth, with total enrollment increasing by 56 percent from 2,006 students in 2012–2013 to 3,134 students in 2024–2025, while improving student retention, graduation rates, and degree completion outcomes; and

WHEREAS, under Dr. Sydow's leadership, dual enrollment participation expanded from 339 students to more than 2,000 students annually, dramatically increasing access and affordability, and the number of high school students earning associate degrees rose from 21 graduates to 83 graduates in two years, with more than 115 projected in 2025–2026; and

WHEREAS, over the course of Dr. Sydow's tenure, Richard Bland College strengthened transfer certainty and upward mobility by expanding guaranteed admission agreements to more than 35 colleges and universities, joining the Aspen Institute's Transfer Scholars Network, and launching the Promise Scholars program to support high-achieving, Pell-eligible students; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sydow demonstrated exemplary fiscal stewardship, overseeing growth in annual state appropriations from approximately \$6 million in fiscal year 2012 to approximately \$16 million in fiscal year 2025, while securing more than \$53 million in state capital funding to transform campus infrastructure, including construction of the \$17 million Academic Innovation Center and major renovations to Ernst Hall and Commerce Hall, expanding residential capacity and modernizing academic facilities; and

WHEREAS, under Dr. Sydow's leadership, Richard Bland College secured more than \$10 million in competitive federal, state, and foundation grants to advance STEM education, workforce training, health care pathways, global engagement initiatives, campus safety, and student wellness; and

WHEREAS, during Dr. Sydow's presidency, Richard Bland College received the largest philanthropic gift in its history, a \$1 million endowment to support the Promise Scholars program, which strengthened guaranteed transfer pathways and expanded opportunities for high-achieving, Pell-eligible students; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sydow guided Richard Bland College to establish the RBC Workforce and Career Readiness Center to connect education directly to employment opportunities, housing initiatives such as the RBC Dealer Institute in partnership with Live! Casino, drone and aviation workforce programs with Richmond International Airport, and health care pathway initiatives with Bon Secours Southside Medical Center, strengthening career pipelines across the Tri-Cities region; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sydow oversaw the expansion of Richard Bland College's intercollegiate athletics program to 15 teams, which annually serve more than 200 student-athletes, who have earned two national championships and 15 conference championships while demonstrating record academic performance; and

WHEREAS, during Dr. Sydow's tenure as president, Richard Bland College established its independent Board of Visitors on July 1, 2025, marking a historic transition from governance by The College of William and Mary to independent institutional authority, which was achieved through sustained and strategic leadership; and

WHEREAS, through her steadfast commitment to access, affordability, academic excellence, and public service, Dr. Sydow leaves Richard Bland College stronger, more visible, and positioned for continued success within the Commonwealth's system of higher education; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sydow has also taught courses at the former Virginia Intermont College, Syracuse University, Old Dominion University, the University of Virginia's College at Wise, and The College of William and Mary, and she serves her community as an active member of numerous organizations, including the Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and the board of M&T Bank; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate of Virginia, That Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D., hereby be commended for her

distinguished leadership of Richard Bland College; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D., as an expression of the Senate of Virginia's admiration for her legacy of achievements and enduring contributions to public higher education in the Commonwealth.