

Statement in Support of Bill No. 36-0241 Honoring [Rashida Hodge](#)

My name is Mark Souza, and I have had the privilege of spending more than 33 years at Microsoft. During that time, I have worked alongside and hired many extraordinary people and leaders. I can say without hesitation that [Rashida Hodge](#) stands among the very best. In fact, I consider Rashida one of the best hires I have made in my 33-year career at Microsoft.

I first came to know Rashida in 2020 as I was looking for an exceptional leader to join Microsoft and help shape our strategy and execution for our applications and database business. At the time, Rashida was a senior executive at IBM and had already built an impressive career working at the forefront of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, including helping commercialize IBM Watson. I knew immediately that she possessed a rare combination of technical depth, business acumen, leadership ability, and passion for customers.

Recruiting Rashida was not easy. She was an accomplished and highly sought-after executive, and I spent considerable time convincing her that Microsoft was the right place for the next chapter of her career. Looking back, every bit of that effort was worth it.

Rashida joined Microsoft in 2021 to lead our Customer Success Azure Data and AI business. I knew Microsoft could benefit from how far ahead she was in understanding the potential of artificial intelligence. This was years before generative AI and today's AI transformation became topics discussed in nearly every boardroom around the world. Rashida had already spent much of her career working with AI and understood not simply the technology itself, but how it could fundamentally change companies, industries, and people's lives.

At Microsoft, Rashida quickly demonstrated why we had worked so hard to recruit her. She helped lead our strategy and execution around Microsoft's database and application technologies and our customers' transition to the Azure cloud. She brought together technology, sales strategy, customer engagement, and execution in a way that made an immediate impact.

One of the contributions I am particularly proud of was the work Rashida drove with respect to our cloud migration factory approach. Moving complex applications, databases, and critical business systems to the cloud can be a daunting undertaking for many of the world's largest companies. Rashida understood that customers needed more than technology. They needed a repeatable approach, skilled people, technical guidance, and confidence that Microsoft would be there with them throughout their transformation. The migration factory approach she championed became an important part of how we help customers migrate successfully and securely to Microsoft Azure, and its concepts continue to be reflected extensively in our field and customer engagement models today.

Just as importantly, Rashida understood that lasting success requires great people. She invested deeply in building our technical sales and customer success community around Microsoft's database, application, cloud, and AI technologies. She built an exceptionally strong organization, attracted talented people, and created an environment where individuals were expected to perform at a high level while also supporting and learning from one another.

That brings me to perhaps the most important aspect of Rashida: the person and the leader.

Great leaders do more than deliver business results. They create other leaders. They inspire people to believe they can accomplish more than they thought possible. Rashida leads from the front and leads by example. She sets high expectations for herself and her teams, but she combines those expectations with compassion, authenticity, and a genuine interest in the people around her. She has

earned the respect of senior leaders, colleagues, employees, partners, and customers, not simply because of what she has achieved, but because of how she achieves it.

Rashida's values are inseparable from her leadership. She is a woman of strong faith and conviction. She is passionate, caring, generous, and deeply committed to her community. She brings an optimism and energy into a room that people immediately feel. Her smile is infectious, but behind that smile is an extraordinarily determined leader with high standards, a tremendous work ethic, and a genuine desire to help others succeed.

One of the things I admire most is that, despite the global scale of her career, Rashida has never forgotten where she came from. When she joined Microsoft, she spoke openly about how growing up in St. Thomas shaped her values of community, generosity, diversity, inclusion, and service. She believes strongly that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and therefore have an obligation to create opportunities for those who will come after us.

Her commitment to the Virgin Islands is a wonderful demonstration of those values. Her investment in future generations, including the establishment of a \$1 million endowment creating educational opportunities for students from the Virgin Islands, speaks to the person I have come to know. For Rashida, success is not simply about how far she can go. It is about how many people she can help bring along with her.

Today, I could not be prouder of what Rashida has accomplished. She has continued to take on greater leadership responsibilities at Microsoft and has distinguished herself as an important voice in one of the most consequential technology transformations of our generation. But titles alone do not adequately capture Rashida's impact. Her legacy will ultimately be measured by the customers she has helped, the organizations she has transformed, the leaders she has developed, and the communities and young people whose lives she has changed.

It has been both a privilege and an honor to have Rashida as a colleague, a member of my leadership team, and a friend. Bringing her to Microsoft remains one of the proudest hiring decisions of my 33-year Microsoft career.

I offer my strongest and most enthusiastic endorsement of **Bill No. 36-0241** honoring [Rashida Hodge](#). I can think of few people more deserving of recognition from the Virgin Islands community that helped shape who she is today. Rashida has represented the Virgin Islands with distinction on a global stage, and she continues to give back to that community with the same passion, generosity, and commitment that she brings to everything she does.

I am extraordinarily proud of her, grateful that I had the opportunity to work alongside her, and honored to offer my support for this well-deserved recognition.

Thank you

Mark Souza

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