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## Brooklyn Grandmother Joins Legislators, Advocates in Receiving Kinship Awards

*Sen. Golden, Assembly Members Jaffee and Mayer, Leora Keith,  
AARP's Bill Ferris, Jewish Board Honored by NYS Kinship  
Navigator for Work in Helping Raise Kids Whose Parents Can't*

**ALBANY, N.Y.** – A Brooklyn grandmother who has raised five grandchildren over more than 32 years joined three state legislators, a lobbyist and a New York organization in being honored today at the New York State Kinship Navigator's Third Annual Kinship Care Month Luncheon.

**Leora Keith** raised her four daughters alone after being widowed at age 36 – then brought up five of her grandchildren to earn the “Outstanding Kinship Caregiver” award from the Kinship Navigator, a statewide program operated by Rochester's Catholic Family Center that provides an information and referral network for relatives raising children whose parents are unable to do so.

**Senator Martin Golden** of Brooklyn and Assemblymembers **Ellen Jaffee** of Rockland and **Shelley Mayer** of Westchester were honored as “Kinship Champions,” part of the “Cura” awards – Latin for “care” or “attention” - during the luncheon held at the New York State Bar Association's offices at 1 Elk Street.

AARP New York Legislative Representative **Bill Ferris** was named “Outstanding Kinship Professional” and the **Jewish Board of Family and Children Services Inc.** “Outstanding Kinship Organization.”

Speakers at the luncheon included **Acting State Office of Children and Families Commissioner Sheila Poole**, who has convened a working group within her agency to address kinship issues, and **Acting State Office for the Aging Director Greg Olsen**, who helped introduce legislation when he worked in the Assembly to implement the Kinship Navigator.

Luncheon attendees also saw a screening of “The Face of Kinship Care,” a short film showing three kinship families from Newburgh, Brooklyn and Port Jervis telling their own stories.

**Kinship Navigator Director Gerard Wallace** noted that Ms. Keith was called to the hospital five times to provide care for a new grandchild, each of whom she raised with love, care and guidance – exemplifying both the spirit and practice of kincare that has helped over 150,000 children across New York.

Through it all, Ms. Keith balanced a 38-year career as an early childhood educator and service as president of the Tenants’ Association for the Tompkins Houses in Brooklyn, Wallace, also a Public Service professor at the University at Albany’s School of Social Welfare, pointed out.

Senator Golden has introduced various kinship bills since 2008, has introduced the Kinship Care Month Resolution in the New York State Senate since 2015 and has shown strong support for legislation that would positively impact kinship caregivers while gaining support for the bills from fellow senators. He has shown a strong commitment to caregivers and their families and continues to be a vocal supporter and leader for kinship care in the Senate.

As Chair of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families, Ms. Jaffee secured \$2 million in funds in this year’s state budget for local kinship programs and the Kinship Navigator. As a new chair of the committee, Assemblymember Jaffee showed her strong commitment to kinship families by making kinship care issues a priority, introducing three bills designed to help make caring for relative children better for all kinship families.

Assemblymember Mayer advocated for a statewide housing study for grandparents and elderly relative caregivers and co-sponsored a housing forum with Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins. . Chair of the Assembly Task Force on Women’s Issues, she has pledged to address the concerns raised in the housing study and by her constituents – including kinship caregivers in Yonkers with whom she met before her election in 2012 - so more kinship caregivers statewide can live in affordable, adequate housing.

Mr. Ferris has lobbied state legislators, authored memos of support and testimony and worked with other advocates since 2000 on strategy and tactics to help gain passage of kinship legislation and secure budget funding to help kinship families. The AARP New York lobbyist has approached his work on kinship care with passion, intensity, and commitment.

The Jewish Board is the largest social service agency in New York City, serving over 43,000 New Yorkers from all backgrounds through 175 programs. Its Kinship Care Program began in 2002 and is designed to promote family stability and offer support, providing comprehensive case management including advocacy, benefits information, legal liaison, support groups, crisis intervention, homelessness prevention and linkage to community resources. The program, developed by **Dr. Deborah Langosch** 30 years ago, also sponsors biennial forums open to the New York City community of kin caregivers. Dr. Langosch, Co-Managing Editor of “GrandFamilies: the Contemporary Journal for Research, Policy and Practice,” has actively worked to advocate, educate, and inform many about the challenges and strengths of kin caregiving over the past three decades.

Each year since 2015, the New York State Assembly and Senate have passed resolutions and **Governor Andrew M. Cuomo** has issued proclamations declaring September as Kinship Care Month. New York is one of 10 states to do so, along with New Jersey, California, Virginia, South Dakota, Vermont, Georgia, Ohio, Arizona, and Nevada. In 2015, the U. S. Senate also passed a unanimous resolution.

*The Kinship Navigator (KN) is a statewide program operated by Catholic Family Center in Rochester, NY and specially designed to provide an information and referral network for kinship caregivers across the entire state. Since 2006, the Kinship Navigator has provided leadership to the kinship community via its mission to inform, advocate, and educate. The Navigator help line and web site provide critical information to thousands of caregivers and the professionals who support them. Visit [www.nysnavigator.org](http://www.nysnavigator.org) or call 877-454-6463. The KinCare Coalition is a network of kinship professionals and caregivers, led by the NYS Kinship Navigator. The Coalition meets regularly via a virtual conference line to discuss kinship issues, offer kinship in-service trainings, and collaborate on advancing kinship policy. If you would like to join the coalition, please email [navigator@nysnavigator.org](mailto:navigator@nysnavigator.org) to be added to our email distribution list!*

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