



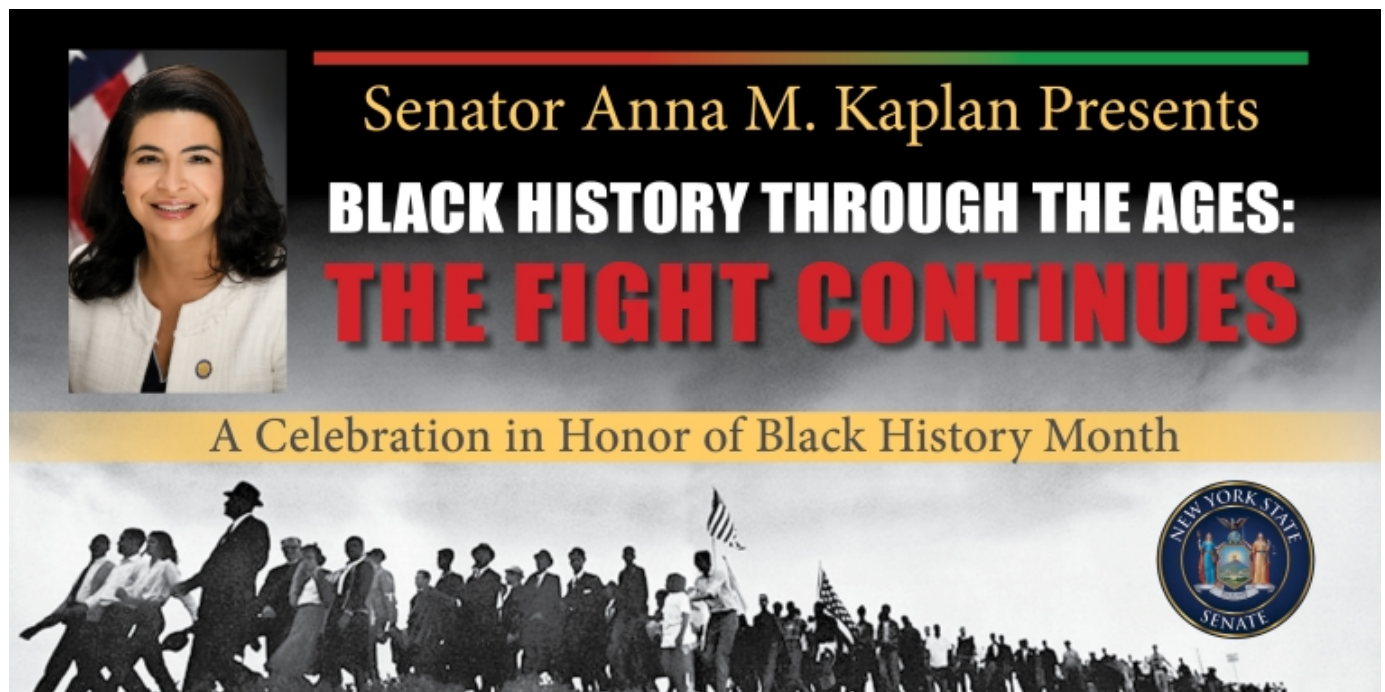
NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Anna M. Kaplan

## Senator Anna M. Kaplan Honors Local Trailblazers at Annual Black History Month Celebration

SENATOR ANNA M. KAPLAN February 17, 2022

| ISSUE: [BLACK HISTORY](#), [BLACK HISTORY MONTH](#), [BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION](#)



CARLE PLACE, NY (February 17, 2022) – On Wednesday, February 16, Senator Anna M. Kaplan (D-North Hills) held her Fourth Annual Black History Month Celebration on Zoom to recognize and celebrate the contributions of African Americans throughout history, and to honor local African American trailblazers and student rising-stars.

Senator Anna M. Kaplan said “Black History Month isn’t just about celebrating the numerous contributions of African Americans throughout our history, it’s also about uplifting Black voices in the present, and committing ourselves to a brighter, more equitable future for everyone. Each year, I’m proud to host a

Black History Month Celebration that does just that, uplifting local trailblazers, Veterans, students, small businesses, and community groups making a difference, while energizing the community to get engaged in the fight for justice.”

This year’s event was led by emcee **Leslie Davis, President of the Westbury Chapter of the NAACP**, and featured a keynote address by **New York State Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin**, and a message from **U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer**. Local students performed for an audience of over 150 guests, with **Jackson Southerland of Great Neck** leading the Pledge of Allegiance, **Westbury High School student Leah Tunnell** performing the National Anthem, and **Elmont High School students Meah Turnier and Justin Scott** performing “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Local faith leaders **Reverend Eddie Alleyne of Church of the Advent** in Westbury, and **Sister Zainab Bey of The Islamic Center of Long Island** opened the event with Invocations, and **Bishop Christopher T. Cox II of Family Life Worship Cathedral** in Elmont closed the event with a Benediction.

The top awards of the evening were given to Hon. Viviana Russell, former **Town of North Hempstead Councilwoman**, and **Dr. Abigail Smith-Lockett**, both of whom were recipients of the **2022 New York State Senate Commendation award**, a prestigious honor reserved for a select few individuals each year whose contributions to our community merit recognition at such a high level. Beloved **Pastor Victor Lewis Jr.** of the **Friendship Baptist Church of Roslyn**, who passed away tragically in 2021, was honored with a Posthumous Proclamation on behalf of the New York State Senate in recognition of his service and dedication to the community. The award was accepted by his daughter Netanya Lewis. Local hero and Veteran of the armed services **Michael Hardy of Westbury** was awarded a proclamation in recognition of his decorated service and leadership of **American Legion Post 1861 of Westbury**. **Jacynth Bucknor**, owner of **Meacham Childcare of Elmont**, was presented with the **2022 Senate Empire Small Business Award**, an honor that’s given to a select few small businesses each year that excel in their field while also giving back to the community. **Elaine Gross**, founder and President of **ERASE Racism**, was honored alongside **New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)**, **New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA)**, and **Phil Andrews**, President of the **Long Island African American Chamber of Commerce**. Each organization received a proclamation in recognition of their tireless efforts to support our community and uplift diverse voices.

Senator Kaplan continued her tradition of recognizing student rising stars from high schools across the district who, through their academic, athletic, or social efforts, have demonstrated leadership, been role models for their peers, and enhanced and promoted the positive image of African Americans in our schools and communities. **Senator Kaplan** said “each of these students represent the best of our communities, and I have no doubt every one of them is destined for greatness and excellence.” The 2022

Student Awardees are **Stephanie Bell (Mineola High School), Alexis Coward (Carle Place High School), Bethany Ekezie (Port Washington High School), Neto Ifebi (Elmont Memorial High School), Kalyn Jones (Great Neck North High School), Wilande Joseph (Westbury High School), Nazir King (Sewanhaka High School), Madison Lewis (Floral Park High School), Samantha Mason (Hicksville High School), Jaden McLeod (H. Frank Carey High School), Desmari Miller (New Hyde Park Memorial High School), and Clayton Thomas (Westbury High School).**