



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Hosts Black Women's History Month Commemoration in Montrose

PETE HARCKHAM May 5, 2025

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State Sen. Pete Harckham with (l-r) KJ Denhert, Sgt. Khalia Carter and NYS Supreme Court Justice Keri Fiore

Three prominent individuals honored—Sgt. Khalia Carter, KJ Denhert and NY Supreme Court Justice Keri Fiore

Montrose, NY – New York State Senator **Pete Harckham** commemorated **Black Women's History Month** on Saturday, May 3, by honoring three prominent individuals from the 40th Senate District—Peekskill Police Sergeant Khalia Carter, singer-songwriter KJ Denhert and New

York Supreme Court Justice Keri Fiore —during a special ceremony held here at the Hendrick Hudson Free Library.

Harckham noted in his remarks that Black Women's History Month was founded in 2016 by social justice advocates in Atlanta, Georgia, and is now recognized internationally. It was created to embrace the cultural, economic and political achievements of Black women, building awareness while celebrating the rich history of our past and present generations.

"Today, we honor three remarkable women—from law enforcement, judiciary and the arts—who have enriched our communities in countless ways, and in doing so they exemplify a model of confident professionalism, sterling achievement and a ready willingness to make a difference in the lives of others," said Harckham. "I am so grateful for the beneficial work that Sergeant Carter, KJ Denhert and Justice Fiore continue to do for all of us—it is truly inspiring. On behalf of the New York State Senate and residents of the 40th Senate District, I offer my sincere thanks to them."

The three honorees received Senate Proclamations from Harckham, and the event brought together family members, colleagues and other guests. To see a video of the ceremony, click [here](#).

Sergeant Khalia Carter holds a bachelor's degree of Business Administration from Monroe University and a master's in Public Administration from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She is also a graduate of the International Association of Chiefs of Police's Women in Leadership Institute.

Beginning her law enforcement career in 2009 as a Special Police Officer with the New York State Office of Mental Health, Sgt. Carter joined the City of Peekskill Police Department in 2012 and was promoted to the rank of sergeant in 2019. She has served as a Field Training

Officer, General Topics Instructor, Bicycle Patrol Officer, and coordinator of the Auxiliary Police Officer Division.

Currently the Commanding Officer of the Community Policing Unit, Sgt. Carter works hard to develop trust between the Police Department and residents, Harckham said, “by fostering strong personal ties and implementing programs to provide resources that meet the diverse needs of the community.”

While also serving as the Peekskill Police Department’s Grants Administrator, Sgt. Carter ensures the integration of grant-funded initiatives into the department’s general operations. Her work has been critical to supporting the K9 Unit, Police Protective Equipment Program, Domestic Violence Initiative, NYS STOP DWI Detail, NYS Vehicle and Traffic Detail and the Child Passenger Safety Program.

“I can’t thank Senator Harckham and his office enough for the support he has given the Peekskill Police Department over the years,” said Sgt. Carter. “With this support, we have been able to complete a number of important projects and meet our goals. I appreciate this recognition, but I would be remiss if I didn’t congratulate the other members of the Peekskill Police Department who stand beside me every day and do a lot of good work in our community. I’m in a unique and excellent position to engage with the community and build relationships, which is just a phenomenal experience.”

An internationally renowned urban folk and jazz artist, **KJ Denhert** is a gifted guitarist and singer-songwriter whose career spans four decades and 11 recorded albums. A longtime Ossining resident, she was born in Brooklyn, NY, to parents who immigrated to New York City from Grenada, Denhert was the first U.S. citizen born to her family. Growing up in the Bronx, she began learning guitar at age 10 and soon began songwriting.

After studying psychology at Cornell University, Denhert worked with a group for a year as a lead guitarist, then spent the next six years touring internationally with the Connecticut-based all-female band Fire. After her departure from the group, Denhert left full-time music for 18 years to work in the private sector, most notably with the French food company Danone S.A.. While working in Cleveland, Denhert founded her own label, Mother Cyclone Records, through which she released her debut album of original music.

In 1997, Denhert moved back to New York City and formed the groove-centric collective NY Unit, which she still performs with to this day, along with her group the Evening News. She has performed around the world for decades and maintained a weekly residency at Manhattan's storied 55 Bar for 25 years until the venue closed in 2022.

Earning critical acclaim as a musical artist and storyteller, Denhert draws from a broad palette of musical genres, including blues, jazz and folk traditions. She has received seven Independent Music Awards and was a winning finalist in the Kerrville New Folk Song Contest, the Mountain Stage New Song Contest and a grand prize finalist in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest.

"I'm grateful to be heard at a time when visibility is so important," said Denhert. "There is a lovely quote from Pope Francis about the job of artists, and he said that job is to make us laugh and to remember there is joy in between the real work that needs to be done. The women who are on stage with me have been doing some real work, and wherever I can help, that's what I'll keep doing."

The Honorable Keri Fiore, a Cortlandt Manor resident, began her legal career after attending St. John's University and Howard University School of Law, working first as a law clerk with a private firm. She joined the New York State Unified Court System as Assistant Law Clerk in 2009, rising through the ranks to serve as an Associate Court Attorney, Senior Court

Attorney and Support Magistrate.

Justice Fiore was elected to the bench in 2022 as a Supreme Court Justice in the 9th Judicial District, presiding in the Westchester County Matrimonial Court. She is a member of several committees throughout the court system, including the Matrimonial Practice Advisory and Rules Committee, Attorneys for Children Advisory Committee and the Pro Bono Subcommittee of the Access to Justice Committee. She also previously served as a member of the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge's Diversity Task Force.

Justice Fiore is an active member of the New York State Bar Association, Westchester County Bar Association, Westchester Women's Bar Association and Westchester Black Bar Association, where she serves as Second Vice President. She previously co-chaired the Westchester County Bar Association's Diversity Committee and is a former member of the Grievance Committee.

Passionate about ensuring equity and fostering diversity, Justice Fiore is committed to promoting social justice in both her personal and professional life. Eager to share her expertise and encourage the next generation, she served as a trustee on the Lakeland Central School District's Board of Education and regularly meets with students to discuss the legal profession.

"I want to stress the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in every aspect of our lives, and the need to ensure opportunities for everyone to reach the goals they set for themselves," said Justice Fiore. "I'm so thrilled to share this recognition with these two women, and hearing about their accomplishments is certainly humbling. Thank you, Senator Harckham, for honoring us here today."