



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well Trustees Appoint Michele Kent and Charisse Smith to Leadership Positions**

At its annual meeting, New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW) appointed Michele Kent as Chair of the Board of Trustees and Charisse Smith, PhD, as Secretary of the Board. Both women were elected unanimously by the current slate of trustees.

Steve Leone of Spiezle Architectural Group stepped down at the end of his term as Chair, and remains an active member of the Board of trustees.

Ms. Kent, retired President and CEO of Leading Age NJ, has held several positions in nonprofit leadership and NJ State Government during her career. She served as the Commissioner for the NJ Department of Human Services and Chief of Staff for the Governor's office from 1994-95.

Charisse Smith holds a Doctorate in Education from Capella University. She currently is the Curriculum Supervisor of Social Studies for the Trenton Public Schools and owner of Sankofa Educational Consulting, LLC. Dr. Smith is also a relative of one of NJAAW's founding members, Carl F. West. Dr. Smith serves as Notre Dame High School's 1st African-American Diversity Chair and Board member in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. Her nonprofit work also includes, the former President of ETE-Excellence Through Education of Hamilton and as the Parent Liaison to the George School Inclusion and Oversight Committee.

Ms. Kent stated: " I am delighted to take the helm of NJAAW and look forward to working with the Board to further the significant improvements led by Steve Leone. Steve oversaw the development of our Strategic Plan and transition to a redefined mission, rebranding and, importantly, the selection of a new Executive Director. He is owed a debt of gratitude and I am very pleased Steve will continue to serve as a trustee. I am confident that NJAAW will continue to develop as we work to ensure that NJ's seniors are given every opportunity to live their best lives."

According to Executive Director Cathy Rowe, both Kent and Smith exemplify the diversity and the range of expertise on NJAAW's board. "The issues around aging do not fit into one box and one size does not fit all. We are very lucky to have trustees with a variety of backgrounds and professional experiences who are all committed to ensuring New Jersey's residents can age well in the state they love."

Dr. Smith's specialty in education has been in diversity, inclusion, and equitable treatment of students in underserved and underprivileged communities. She noted "I am honored to continue the legacy of Carl F. West, founding member of NJAAW, by serving as Secretary and maintaining the focus of advocating for diversity, inclusion, and equitable treatment of our older New Jersey residents."

NJAAW's Board of Trustees and their current affiliations include:

- Michele Kent, Chair, retired
- Andrea Lubin, Vice-chair, Rutgers University
- Charisse Smith, PhD, Secretary, Trenton Public Schools
- John Mostello, Treasurer, Wells Fargo
- Carl Archer, Esq., Archer Brogan Law
- Steve Landers, MD, VNA Health Group
- Steve Leone, Spiezle Architectural Group
- Bill O'Donnell, retired
- Josh Raymond, MD, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School/Centra State Health Care
- Celeste Roberts-Sang, MSW, Retired
- Viki Sharma, MD, VNHA Health Group/CentraState Health Care

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About NJAAW: NJ Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW, [njaaw.org](http://njaaw.org)), formerly NJ Foundation for Aging, has been on the forefront of revolutionizing the aging experience since 1998. It is the only statewide nonprofit focused solely on providing leadership in public policy and education to enable older adults to live with independence and dignity in their communities. NJAAW's social action issues include senior housing and hunger, elder economic security, older workers, the direct care workforce, and transportation. The award-winning Aging Insights, a monthly topical TV program and podcast produced by NJAAW, connects caregivers, seniors and their families to community based services and resources. The show is available on [youtube.com/user/njfoundationforaging/](https://www.youtube.com/user/njfoundationforaging/), NJAAW's website and on more than 70 public access TV stations. NJAAW also presents educational forums and an Annual Conference offering development opportunities and best practices for professionals entrusted with caring for seniors.