

2021-J2091

Senate Resolution No. 2091

BY: Senator KAPLAN

COMMEMORATING the 100th Anniversary of the first
Bat Mitzvah ceremony in the United States on March
18, 2022

WHEREAS, Religious rituals, and the many spiritual, social and
educational benefits they confer, play a vital role in the development
of the moral fabric of a responsible citizenry; and

WHEREAS, It is the tradition of this State and this Nation to pay
tribute to those sacred rituals and individuals who have contributed to
the ethical and spiritual values of their communities; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the
100th Anniversary of the first Bat Mitzvah Ceremony in the United
States; and

WHEREAS, On March 18, 1922, 12-year-old Judith Kaplan became the
first American to celebrate a Bat Mitzvah; her father, Rabbi Mordecai
Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, believed that girls
should have the same religious opportunities as their brothers, so he
arranged for his daughter to read Torah on a Shabbat morning at his
synagogue, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism; and

WHEREAS, Even though Judith Kaplan merely read a passage in Hebrew
and English from a printed Chumash (the first five books of the Bible)

after the regular Torah service, it marked a turning point for women's roles in Conservative Judaism in America; and

WHEREAS, By 1948, about a third of Conservative congregations had conducted Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, and by the 1960s, Bat Mitzvah was a regular feature of Conservative congregational life; today, it is a mainstay in synagogues from Reform to Modern Orthodox; and

WHEREAS, After her Bat Mitzvah, Judith Kaplan married Ira Eisenstein, who became Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan's successor, and went on to enjoy a successful career in the Jewish music industry; after studying at the Institute of Musical Art (now the Juilliard School) in New York, she attended the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) Teachers Institute and Columbia University's Teachers College, where she earned her Master of Arts degree in music education in 1932; later, she furthered her education by obtaining her PhD in the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR); and

WHEREAS, Judith Kaplan taught music pedagogy and the history of Jewish music at JTS, HUC-JIR, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College for many years; and

WHEREAS, This talented and inspirational woman also created the first Jewish songbook for children, Gateway to Jewish Song (1937), and published Festival Songs (1943) and Heritage of Music: The Music of the Jewish People (1972); in 1987, she created and broadcasted a 13-hour radio series on the history of Jewish music; and

WHEREAS, In 1992, at the age of 82, Judith Kaplan Eisenstein celebrated a second Bat Mitzvah, surrounded by leaders of the modern Jewish feminist movement; this time, she read from a Torah scroll; and

WHEREAS, Judith Kaplan Eisenstein died on February 14, 1996; throughout her storied life, she truly made a difference for millions of Jewish women in the United States, and to the lives of all those she educated, sang to and filled with hope and joy; and

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to take note of enduring religious rituals and to bring such traditions to the attention of the people of this Empire State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the first Bat Mitzvah ceremony in the United States on March 18, 2022; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to various Jewish organizations throughout the State of New York.