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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Spearheads "Light the Way" Initiative with First Spouses from Across the Nation to Bring Greater Awareness of Down Syndrome Cognition Research

Friday, March 20, 2015 Tags: [First Lady](#)



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Drumthwacket to Illuminate in Blue on March 21st to Recognize World Down Syndrome Day



Trenton, NJ – First Lady Mary Pat Christie is leading a national effort to bring attention to Down syndrome cognition research, a bio-medical initiative targeted at developing drug therapies aimed at improving memory, learning and communication for individuals with Down syndrome. Mrs. Christie is being joined by 28 other First Spouses from around the country who are participating in this year's "Light the Way" program to help raise awareness in their home states.

Additionally, Governor Christie has proclaimed March 21 as Down Syndrome Day in New Jersey. Later that evening, Drumthwacket, the Governor's official residence in Princeton, will be illuminated in blue to symbolize Mrs. Christie's support of Down syndrome cognitive research.

"I am pleased to have so many First Spouses participate in this year's *Light the Way* campaign and I sincerely thank them all for lending their support to an effort that not only expands awareness, but helps to empower adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New Jersey and across the nation," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. "The vital research generated through foundations like Research Down Syndrome (RDS) and LuMind are spurring scientific advancements that are giving these individuals greater opportunities to live independent and fulfilling lives that emphasize community, work and self-reliance."

To date, First Spouses from Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming are participating in this year's *Light the Way* initiative. In Florida, Governor Rick Scott and First Lady Ann Scott declared March 16-20 Down Syndrome Awareness Week and on March 21, the Florida Governor's Mansion will be lit in blue.

March 21 is particularly meaningful to the *Light the Way* campaign because Down syndrome results from the presence of three copies of chromosome 21. Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal disorder, affecting over 400,000 Americans. It occurs in approximately 1 in every 700 births. Between 2006 and 2010, approximately 1.2 of every 1,000 babies was born with Down syndrome.

The Light the Way campaign will add support to the efforts of non-profit foundations Research Down Syndrome (RDS) and LuMind Foundation to educate and increase awareness and funding for Down syndrome cognition research. Research already funded by the foundations is making encouraging progress in identifying potential treatments to lessen the impact of Alzheimer's disease in persons with Down syndrome. Alzheimer's disease is 3-5 times more likely to occur, at an earlier age of onset, in individuals with Down syndrome.

In the last few years, researchers have made significant progress toward understanding and treating the cognitive issues associated with Down syndrome. This initiative has led to several discoveries and supported the initiation of four clinical trials testing potential drug treatments. These studies now provide the promise of biomedical therapies for improving memory, learning and communication in individuals with Down syndrome, offering the potential for increased life opportunities.

For more information, please visit <http://www.researchds.org> or <http://www.lumindfoundation.org>.

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