



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

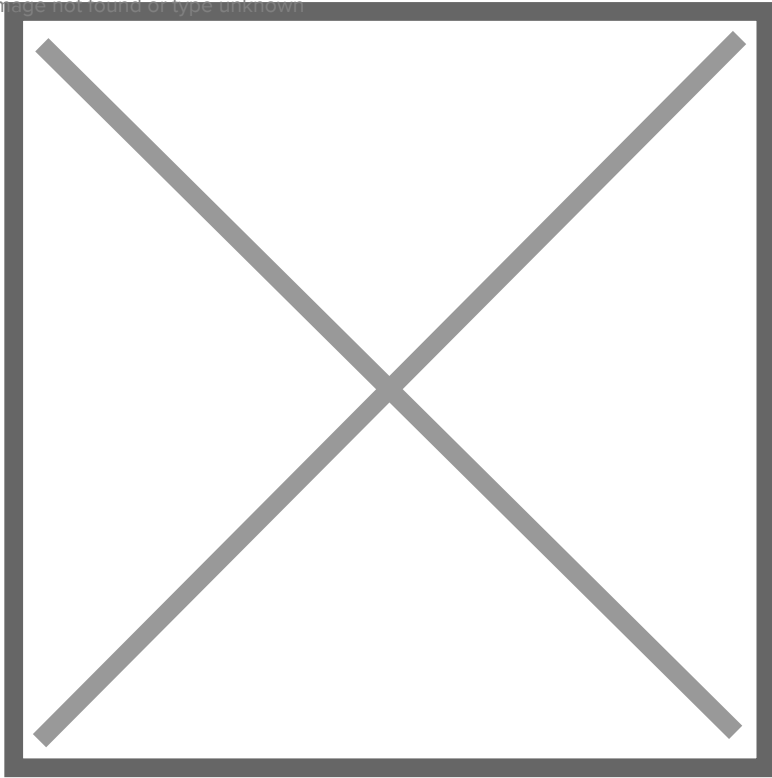
WNY Lawmakers Urge State Action to Ban Synthetic Drugs

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY March 23, 2012

| ISSUE: **CRIME, CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES, DRUGS**



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Pending legislation to prohibit sale and distribution of synthetic drugs nearing vote in State Senate

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Western New York lawmakers are urging immediate action from the state to ban synthetic drugs. Abuse of these chemicals is growing locally and nationally, but the state has done little to slow or stop the rapid spread of synthetic marijuana. Senator Tim Kennedy and Assembly members Dennis Gabryszak and Crystal Peoples-Stokes say the time for delay and inaction are over. They want the state to pass measures to prohibit the sale and distribution of synthetic drugs.

Synthetic marijuana is known to cause serious negative health effects including vomiting, seizures, increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure and heart attack. Communities and schools have seen a spike in the use of these designer drugs, and residents are concerned about the impact on their neighborhoods.

The lawmakers are pushing the State Legislature to approve a bill ([S.1834/A.7231A](#)) – which they cosponsor in their respective chambers – to prohibit the sale and distribution of any product containing a synthetic cannabinoid. Currently, there are no state laws to prevent the sale of these chemical substances.

“We know where synthetic drugs are sold, but law enforcement can’t do anything about it because the state has failed to act when it comes to prohibiting the sale and distribution of these dangerous chemicals,” said Senator Tim Kennedy. “Synthetic drugs have caused severe health effects including heart attacks in teenagers, yet this market has gone unregulated and unmonitored. We need to get these chemicals off store shelves before another family is forced to endure a tragedy.

“The state’s inaction has left law enforcement powerless to protect our neighborhoods and our young people against synthetic drugs,” Kennedy added. “It’s long overdue that state lawmakers stand up and empower law enforcement with the tools they need to crackdown on these dangerous drugs.”

“I support a ban on the sale of products containing synthetic cannabinoids, which are designed to mimic the effects of illegal drugs,” said Assemblyman Dennis Gabryszak. “It is easy for teenagers to gain access to synthetic cannabinoids, and the use of these substances have caused a number of medical emergencies. I urge my colleagues in the Legislature to support measures to outlaw the sale of synthetic cannabinoids.”

Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes said, “The health of our children cannot be compromised by the use of synthetic marijuana, which causes irreversible damage including heart attacks and severe brain damage. Our children are being lured into using these drugs as substitute, while manufacturers skirt laws around classification and sell these products as incense. Synthetic marijuana has made its way into Western New York but is banned in

countries around the world. It must be banned here as well.”

They made their call for state action Friday at a press conference in front of the Cheektowaga Police and Courts building. Joining them in support of the ban on synthetic marijuana were New York State Police, Cheektowaga Police, Buffalo Police and the Erie County Sheriff’s Office.

Ronald Tritto, executive director of Kids Escaping Drugs, announced the well-known drug advocacy organization supports the ban on synthetic marijuana. He said Alcohol & Drug Dependency Services has seen an uptick in clients who have used synthetic marijuana and suffered its effects. Chris C., a young man who has received help from Kids Escaping Drugs, spoke about how synthetic marijuana affected him and encouraged the state to make it illegal.

The lawmakers’ efforts were also supported by Cheektowaga Town Supervisor Mary Holtz and other elected leaders.

“This problem transcends any one neighborhood, group or community,” Senator Kennedy noted. “The effects have been felt in towns and cities across the state – in schools where students have used the drugs, in hospitals that have treated users and in police stations where officers are eager to prevent the drugs’ proliferation.”

While the drugs are accessible online, police officials are aware of numerous outlets where synthetic drugs can be purchased throughout Western New York. The most recent “Monitoring the Future” survey conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that one of every nine high school seniors have used the drug in the last year.

Medical professionals have observed the immediate health effects and linked them to synthetic drugs, but the long-term effects have yet to be studied. Dangerous chemicals – like

those found in synthetic marijuana – can be destructive to the natural development of teenager’s growing brains. It has also been said that synthetic cannabinoids share similar chemical structures with many cancer-causing substances and may contain residues of hazardous heavy metals.

The lawmakers commended Senator Charles Schumer for leading the fight at the federal level to ban synthetic drugs. They support him in his efforts and know he will relentlessly pursue federal legislation. In anticipation of federal action, Kennedy, Peoples-Stokes and Gabryszak feel the state should pass a ban on synthetic marijuana immediately to help create drug-free neighborhoods across New York.

Senator Kennedy is also cosponsoring legislation ([S.6694](#)) to establish penalties for the criminal sale and possession of synthetic cannabinoids and substituted cathinones – which are often referred to as “bath salts” and mimic the effects of methamphetamines and ecstasy. This bill will help prevent synthetic drugs from being illegally trafficked underground. It also contains provisions to create a synthetic drug amnesty and surrender program to allow these harmful substances to be turned over to appropriate authorities.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate’s 58th District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, Eden, Hamburg and West Seneca, the city of Lackawanna and parts of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.