



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Urges State Education Department to Move Swiftly on Cantalician Center Expansion Application

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY November 30, 2012

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**



*State Education Department has put a freeze on applications in process, which could force displacement of hundreds of local students with severe disabilities.*

*State Ed says it will consider exceptions to their freeze on application approvals; Kennedy pushes for Cantalician Center to receive exception and swift approval of expansion.*

*Kennedy: State Ed Can't Let Student Learning Get Stuck in Bureaucratic Red Tape*

BUFFALO, N.Y. –Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is urging the New York State Education Department to grant an exception to the Cantalician Center and allow their application to move forward despite a bureaucratic freeze on applications in process. Approval of the application is critical to allowing the Cantalician Center to continue to provide their students with the high-quality education and care they deserve. Kennedy sent NYSED a letter urging them to grant the exception and approve Cantalician’s expansion.

In September, the Cantalician Center held a grand opening ceremony to cut the ribbon on a brand new and expanded facility on George Urban Boulevard in Depew. After just a few weeks of operation, the new school for children with disabilities has found itself stuck in a bureaucratic snag. NYSED has suspended the processing and approval of applications for various special education programs across the state, including the expansion of operations at the Cantalician Center.

This suspension of application approvals threatens to displace hundreds of local students with severe disabilities, and it could cost the Cantalician Center about \$100,000 in program reimbursements each month.

NYSED has left the door open for potential exceptions to their suspension of application approvals. In a notice sent to the organizations affected by this freeze, they write, “NYSED may determine it is necessary to provide an exception, on a case-by-case basis, if there is a compelling case that students would otherwise be unable to obtain necessary services from existing providers and programs.”

Kennedy says that’s exactly the case for students at the Cantalician Center, and he’s hopeful NYSED will do the right thing and grant the exception at a meeting in the coming days.

“The Cantalician Center has long made it their mission to ensure local children – regardless of any physical or intellectual disability – have access to exceptional learning and exceptional care,” Kennedy said. “However, this suspension of application approvals from the State Education Department could put an abrupt halt on their work. It threatens to displace hundreds of local students with severe disabilities, and it could financially drain the Cantalician Center of about \$100,000 in program reimbursements every month. I am hopeful the State Education Department will grant the Cantalician Center an exception, approve their expansion and protect the hundreds of local students the school serves.”

“The Cantalician Center’s focus is on community involvement and working together for the education and acceptance of individuals with disabilities,” said **Terese M. Scofidio, executive director of the Cantalician Center**. “We have worked hand in hand with the State Education Department on this endeavor. The financial impact and resulting program implications of this suspension will dramatically affect not just the agency but those who depend on us. We know with the support of Senator Kennedy and the community at large, our State leaders will support us in the successful completion of this project.”

The \$16 million project the Cantalician Center recently completed included the consolidation of two aging facilities into their new campus in Depew and an expansion of their programs to open up new educational opportunities for local children with disabilities. In addition to offering state-of-the-art classrooms and a variety of new amenities, the consolidation project is saving the Cantalician Center about \$300,000 annually – which will be reinvested into student programming. The project has garnered strong support from local, state and federal elected officials, as well as millions of dollars from foundations such as the Oishei Foundation.

You can read the full text of Senator Kennedy’s letter to NYSED below or by [clicking on this link](#).

###

*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 [kennedy.nysenate.gov](http://kennedy.nysenate.gov).*

James DeLorenzo

Assistant Commissioner

New York State Education Department

Office of Special Education

Special Education Policy/Program Development and Support Services

89 Washington Avenue, Room 309 EB

Albany, New York 12234

Dear Assistant Commissioner DeLorenzo:

Yesterday, the Office of Special Education initiated a temporary administrative suspension of the initial approval of applications for preschool special education programs, school-age private school programs, and applications for expansions of currently approved preschool special education programs and approved school-age private schools. For the Cantalician Center in Depew, New York, this suspension could cost them upwards of \$100,000 per month in program reimbursements and threatens to displace hundreds of students with severe disabilities in the middle of the school year. **I am writing to request that you grant them an exception to the suspension and allow the Office of Special Education to process the approval of their program changes and expansion as quickly as possible.**

The Cantalician Center's project to consolidate two aging facilities into their new campus in Depew addressed serious challenges, such as lack of space, handicap accessibility issues and efficiency concerns. Their new campus offers state-of-the art classrooms and dedicated physical therapy, occupational therapy and sensory rooms, along with new fitness, music and art facilities. In addition, the consolidation of resources is saving them \$300,000 annually – dollars that will be put back into student programming. In short, the new Cantalician Center has been a hugely successful undertaking for the students who need these services and the surrounding community. The project has garnered strong support from local, state and federal elected officials, as well as millions of dollars from foundations such as the Oishei Foundation.

The Cantalician Center has been working closely with NYSED's Western New York Regional Office on their application for program changes and expansion. They have fulfilled every request that NYSED has put before them in order to be able to serve more students in their facility. As you know, the process is very lengthy. While they were unable to complete the process by the November 5th date, they are extremely close to approval. Halting this process now would be severely disruptive to the school and to the students who desperately need these services.

Thank you for your serious consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office at (716) 826-2683.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 58<sup>th</sup> District

