



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Leads Budget Fight to Protect Cheektowaga YES

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY March 4, 2014

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*Statewide Youth Development Program funding which supports Cheektowaga Youth Engaged in Service (YES) was significantly cut in recent budget proposal – Kennedy pushes to restore funds.*

*This funding provides assistance for enrichment and engagement opportunities for children and youth in WNY and across the state.*

*Kennedy: New York must say ‘Yes’ to funding Cheektowaga YES and youth programs like it across the state.*

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy is leading the fight in the State Capitol to protect and restore funding for Cheektowaga YES (Youth Engaged in Service) and youth programs like it in Western New York and across the state. The current budget proposal reduces funding for the statewide Youth Development Program, which directs funds to local groups like Cheektowaga YES. However, Senator Kennedy is pushing to reverse these cuts and restore funding for important programs that support local youth and families.

“Cheektowaga YES engages this town’s youth in productive activities that help them learn life skills while helping others,” said Senator Kennedy. “There is a monumental return for taxpayers on the minimal investment the state directs to youth development programs like Cheektowaga YES. It shows children and young people the importance of getting involved in their community and encourages them to make a difference. It also provides towns and cities with a corps of civic-minded youth who are dedicated to serving their neighbors in need. These programs keep kids out of trouble, strengthens their resumes for college or careers and reduces costs of vital services provided by local municipalities.

“When it comes to our community’s youth, New York must say ‘Yes’ to funding Cheektowaga YES and youth programs like it across the state,” Kennedy added. “I urge my colleagues in the State Capitol to help us restore funding for vital youth development program that children and families rely on.”

In the 2013-14 state budget, Senator Kennedy and his fellow state legislators provided an additional \$1.28 million for the statewide Youth Development Program (YDP), lifting funding above \$15.3 million. However, the 2014-15 proposed budget zeroes out the additional funding that the Legislature provided last year. Senator Kennedy is calling on the Governor and his Senate and Assembly colleagues to restore the \$1.28 million in YDP funding to ensure Cheektowaga YES receives the funding it needs to support the town’s youth.

Jillian Gorman-King, program coordinator for Town of Cheektowaga Youth & Recreational Services, said, "Cheektowaga YES and the youth who participate in our program are committed to helping support families, seniors and all residents of Cheektowaga and Western New York. Our work would not be possible without the support of leaders like Senator Kennedy who are always willing to stand up and protect the funding we receive from the state. We'll be standing with Senator Kennedy to help preserve the state's support for Cheektowaga YES, and we encourage other Senators and Assembly members to join us in this cause, which will have a statewide impact."

The Town of Cheektowaga's Youth Engaged in Service (YES) program successfully utilizes Youth Development Program funding to help local young people learn the importance of being involved in their community and giving back to those in need. YES engages youth from Cheektowaga and surrounding communities in community-service programs such as helping nursing home residents, mentoring younger children through arts and crafts programming and working with adults and children with disabilities. Each year, approximately 250 youth participate in the YES program.

If the funding is not restored, Cheektowaga YES would lose close to 10 percent of its overall budget. This would result in the organization having to scale down on numerous free community services they provide, such as sunshine baskets for Hospice care, Meals on Wheels support, Nursing home activities, providing volunteer services at Ronald McDonald House, participating in Cards for Troops and other services. This funding cut may also cause them to raise their prices on family events they sponsor that they try to keep very affordable for the entire family.

The YES program also supports the Cheektowaga Youth & Recreational Services Department, which utilizes YES volunteers and staff for a plethora of events. This allows the Youth & Recreation department to keep costs down while still offering quality

programming.

Youth Development Program provides financial support for groups and programs throughout Western New York. Erie County and the City of Buffalo, along with the Town of Cheektowaga, are among the local municipalities that receive YDP funds. Local groups like the Valley Community Association, Seneca-Babcock Community Association, Schiller Park Community Services, Buffalo Urban League, Belle Center, Boys & Girls Clubs of Buffalo and many others also receive support from the Youth Development Program.

This state funding supports an ongoing process in which children and adolescents are connected with opportunities to build life skills that help them achieve success and reach their fullest potential. A strong youth development system will ensure timely high school graduation, career-readiness, higher levels of civic engagement and help young people overcome trials and tribulations such as involvement with the juvenile-delinquency system. This type of funding saves taxpayers' money by keeping youth out of trouble with productive activities – which reduces crime rates, and therefore eases the financial strain on municipalities and our criminal justice system.

In the photo above, Cheektowaga YES coordinators and volunteers visited Albany recently to encourage legislators in the State Capitol to support their cause. From left to right, YES Director Melissa Nosal, Kayla Whalen, Cheektowaga Youth & Recreational Services Program Coordinator Jillian Gorman-King and Kaia Skurzewski with Senator Tim Kennedy in the Senate chambers.

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*