



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## As WNY Recovers from Harsh Winter, Senator Kennedy Calls for Increased Aid to Municipalities Strained by Winter's Heavy Costs

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY March 20, 2014

| ISSUE: **CITIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, TOWNS OR COUNTIES, VILLAGES**



*Harsh winter has become financial burden for local governments – Total costs for road salt and cold-patch materials double in Lackawanna. Cheektowaga nearing \$1 million in total winter-related costs.*

*Kennedy urges colleagues in State Government to support efforts to raise aid to municipalities to help communities financially recover from storms.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Following the unprecedented second blizzard to hit Western New York in two months and with snowfall totals already 20 inches above average, Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is calling for increased state aid for municipalities that have been financially strained by this harsh winter's heavy costs. Since 2008-09, state aid to municipalities has been cut by \$50 million, which represents a seven percent cut for cities, villages and towns. With proposed funding again frozen in the initial budget plan, Kennedy wants the state to increase aid for municipalities and grow its investment to support vital services like snow removal.

The Town of Cheektowaga estimates winter-storm response costs already close to \$900,000. In Lackawanna, costs for road salt and cold-patch materials are more than double last year's totals. The City of Buffalo has reported that this winter has been one of its most expensive in many years.

In light of these surging costs burdening local governments, Kennedy is urging the state to allocate additional funding to support cities, towns and villages in Western New York and across the state. Funding for Aid and Incentives for Municipalities (AIM) was proposed to remain flat at \$715 million in the initial budget plan. Kennedy wants the state to invest additional AIM funding across the state to help municipalities financially recover from this year's harsh winter and to help provide necessary property tax relief for residents.

“This winter has packed such a hard punch that it's leaving holes in municipal budgets,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “As Western New Yorkers, we've been through our fair share of tough winters, and we know how to prepare and budget for severe weather. However, this winter season has been especially harsh on our communities. It's the first time Western New York has endured two blizzards in one season. Under these unprecedented circumstances, local governments deserve some relief. Increasing state aid for municipalities will help local cities, towns and villages financially recover from this year's severe weather and empower them to

prepare for whatever may come next year.

“By enhancing the state’s investment in Western New York’s towns, cities and villages, we will provide local taxpayers with much-needed property tax relief since local governments will be able to reduce their reliance on local tax levies,” Kennedy added.

**Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown** said, “We applaud Senator Kennedy for fighting for needed funding for municipalities following this harsh winter.”

In 2014, the Town of Cheektowaga Highway Department has already spent about \$240,000 on overtime expenses related to winter-storm response. Over the course of this winter season, Cheektowaga estimates the total cost of salt on local roads to be about \$480,250, and their fuel expenses for snow-removal equipment is close to \$150,000. That brings their winter-related costs to about \$870,000, and that’s before any vehicle-service costs are factored in.

**Cheektowaga Highway Superintendent Mark Wegner** said, “This harsh winter has been especially tough on our budget, and it would be a huge help for us if the state followed Senator Kennedy’s lead and increased aid for municipalities like the Town of Cheektowaga. We’ll be standing with Senator Kennedy in his fight for our fair share.”

In Lackawanna, road salt has cost the city \$68,500 during the current fiscal year, while last year, the total salt expenditure was just \$30,552. Overtime has also shot upward for the city’s Department of Public Works. OT costs for the current fiscal year are \$56,793, but last year, the DPW’s total overtime costs were \$39,221. For cold-patch materials, which provide a temporary winter fix for potholes, Lackawanna DPW has spent \$12,000, while they only had to use just \$6,000 worth of cold patch in 2013.

**Lackawanna City Council President Hank Pirowski** said, “I want to thank Senator Kennedy for bringing this issue to light. There has been a severe strain on municipalities’ budgets this

year. Not only has our area endured two blizzards for the first time, there has been numerous instances of either the Skyway or Thruway or both being closed. That traffic is diverted through the City of Lackawanna, and our infrastructure simply was not built to handle this increased work load, especially from the semi-trucks and 18-wheelers that have been passing through our city.”

In their one-house budget resolution, the State Assembly proposed a \$280 million increase in AIM funds, of which \$200 million was earmarked specifically for New York City. The Senate Republican Majority Coalition proposed increasing AIM by \$200 million, but their plan will send the entire \$200 million to New York City. Senator Kennedy is calling for a significant increase in aid to municipalities to be disbursed across the state to the benefit of communities like Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Lackawanna and others in Western New York.

The New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) reports that AIM has proven to be an effective property tax relief program. NYCOM data indicates that when AIM funds were increased, property tax levies remained more under control – with tax-levy growth staying under the cost-of-living. However, their data also shows that in those years when AIM suffers cuts, tax levies have increased at higher levels that are far more unaffordable to taxpayers.

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