



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Following Visit to Buffalo's Child Advocacy Center, Leader Stewart-Cousins Joins Senator Kennedy, Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes to Call for Stronger Laws to Prevent Child Abuse

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY April 14, 2014

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*Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes to hold public forum Saturday, April 19 to give families the chance to share experiences and insight to further inform efforts to improve Child Protective Services.*

*Leader Stewart-Cousins announces support for Kennedy, Peoples-Stokes CPS reform package.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins visited Buffalo's Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center with Senator Tim Kennedy and Assemblywoman

Crystal Peoples-Stokes this weekend. During their visit, Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes outlined the comprehensive reforms they're pursuing to improve Child Protective Services and help prevent child abuse and neglect. The lawmakers agreed that stronger laws to protect children and families should be a top priority for the remainder of this year's legislative session.

To advance their ongoing efforts to pass comprehensive legislation, Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes will hold a public forum Saturday, April 19 to give families the chance to be heard on CPS issues. The forum will start at 10 a.m. at the Downtown Central Library auditorium, 1 Lafayette Square in Buffalo. Families will have the opportunity to share details on how CPS has affected them to help inform legislative reforms in Albany. Individuals interested in testifying at the forum should RSVP by calling Senator Kennedy's office at 826-2683 or Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes' office at 897-9714.

"Families in Western New York and across the state are counting on the State Legislature to take action to help prevent child abuse and neglect and improve Child Protective Services. We cannot let them down," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "With the support of Leader Stewart-Cousins, we have a determined ally in our fight for stronger laws to keep children safe. Now, we hope to hear from local families who have first-hand experiences and unique insight to help further inform our efforts to pass comprehensive reforms to improve child protection across the state."

"We are looking forward to this weekend's community forum as a means of brokering opportunities to review and bring resolution to families' individual cases," stated **Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes, Assemblymember of the 141st District**.

**Senate Democratic Conference Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said, "I thank both Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes for this crucial legislation that will help ensure

that Child Protective Services is more responsive and accountable, provide better training and preparation for CPS workers and enhance the effectiveness of the statewide hotline so that children across New York State are kept safe. It is clear that our CPS systems desperately need to be strengthened and improved, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to accomplish that.”

“I want to thank Leader Stewart-Cousins for taking time to visit the Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center, which has been doing tremendous work to improve our community’s response to child abuse and support the healing of victims,” Senator Kennedy said.

Based on Franklin Street in Buffalo, the Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center, a program of Child and Adolescent Treatment Services, takes an innovative, collaborative approach to respond to child abuse and support victims. During the Leader’s visit Saturday, Judith Olin, director of the Child Advocacy Center, provided details of the methods they take to improve community response to child abuse. The center brings together child protection services, prosecutors, police agencies as well as specially-trained medical and mental health professionals to address the needs of abused children and their families.

In this year’s budget, Kennedy, Peoples-Stokes and Stewart-Cousins worked with their Legislature colleagues to increase funding for Child Advocacy Centers statewide by \$2.57 million, a 43 percent boost over last year. Increased funding for Child Advocacy Centers is an important component of improving protections for kids, and now the lawmakers are renewing their push for strong legislation to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The legislation proposed by Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes is gaining traction in Albany. Their proposals include:

- Ensuring Child Protective Services workers are trained and prepared for their unique and challenging work.
- New accountability by strengthening involvement of mandated reporters in CPS investigations.
- Reforming excessive corporal punishment statutes to ensure deeper investigations when violent, extreme and senseless corporal punishment is reported.
- Reforming protocols for the interviewing of children in suspected abuse cases to ensure more accurate and thorough investigations.
- Strengthening the statewide child abuse hotline to track repeat reports of abuse.
- Improving investigations and ensuring accountability by requiring photographic evidence be gathered during caseworker visits.

Starting at 10 a.m. Saturday in the Downtown Central Library, parents, families and advocates will have an opportunity to share their personal experiences, offer informed insight or raise any concerns involving Child Protective Services. Experts in the fields of child protection and abuse prevention will also be on hand to answer questions.

In order to ensure everyone who wants to be heard has the chance to speak, all testifiers will be asked to keep their testimony brief. Those interested in speaking must RSVP by calling Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes' office or Senator Kennedy's office. Only those who RSVP will be guaranteed a chance to speak.

Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes will utilize the testimony they hear Saturday to further inform their efforts to pass comprehensive legislation to improve Child Protective Services locally and across the state.