



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Announces Legislation to Improve CPS Transparency Passes Out of Committee, Ready for Consideration of Full Senate

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY May 30, 2014

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Kennedy-sponsored Legislation that Would Add Increased Transparency to CPS has Gained Momentum in Albany and Passed Through Key Committee.

Proposed bills will require local CPS agencies to disclose caseloads – overburdened workers have been a major concern – and allow CPS department heads to, in good faith, share critical information about individual cases to shed light on gaps in the system.

Caseloads in Erie County may be as high as 40 or 50 cases per worker, according to recent reports.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – As Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffero, continues his push to improve Child Protective Services in Western New York and across New York State, he announced new progress on key reforms that will increase transparency within local CPS agencies. Kennedy helped two important bills that aim to sharpen public knowledge of CPS operations secure approval from the Senate Children and Families Committee, which moves them toward a vote before the full Senate.

The legislation will require local CPS agencies to report specific details about worker caseloads in response to concerns over individual caseworkers being overburdened due to insufficient local resources, while the other bill will allow the head of local departments that oversee Child Protective Services to, in good faith, disclose important information about individual cases to shed light on gaps in the system.

“It is critical that we gain access to the information necessary to help us keep our children safe. These reforms will increase transparency within Child Protective Services and help improve the responsiveness of the system,” said Senator Kennedy. “This urgently-needed legislation will gear us with critical information which is a necessary tool to strengthen protections for children in Western New York and across the state.”

In many counties throughout the state, CPS caseworkers are overburdened with extremely heavy caseloads due to a lack of sufficient resources provided at the local level. The Buffalo News recently reported that caseloads for some workers in Erie County CPS are as high as 40 or 50 cases, while New York State recommends caseloads between 12 to 15 cases.

CPS caseworkers have an extremely difficult and important job to do, and it becomes even more difficult to thoroughly investigate every case when their caseloads are excessively high – especially if their caseloads are three times the state-recommended levels as they have been in Erie County.

However, even though high caseloads can be a significant factor impacting case outcomes, state law does not require local CPS agencies to disclose worker caseloads. A bill Kennedy cosponsors ([S.7524](#)) will change that by directing local Departments of Social Services to release an annual report that outlines the average caseload per worker per month. The legislation requires the report to detail the number of workers who have an average caseload of over 15 cases and to outline steps that the local agency is taking to lower the average caseload of CPS workers. This report will better inform the State Legislature of necessary reforms, and ensure counties and the state are aware of any need for additional resources within specific counties.

“Unfortunately, in communities across the state, CPS caseworkers are overburdened with extremely high caseloads that are well above the state’s recommendations to ensure thorough investigations,” Kennedy said. “It is imperative that Child Protective Services is provided with the resources they need to protect children and help families in our community. This legislation will improve oversight and shed light on any local needs for increased funding or additional resources, and we will fight to ensure those needs are addressed.”

Following recent child fatalities in Erie County, the public and area officials, led by Senator Kennedy, were demanding answers about how the system had failed and what must be done to prevent similar tragedies in the future. However, current privacy laws prevent county officials overseeing CPS agencies to come forward with full answers to the community’s questions about individual cases. Kennedy’s bill ([S.7127](#)) will allow local commissioners of social services and CPS agencies to disclose critical information about individual cases to ensure the public, as well as local legislators and decision-makers, have access to the facts in order to direct necessary changes to correct any problems within the system.

Now that these bills have passed through committee, they move toward votes before the full Senate.

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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>.