



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Kennedy, Peoples-Stokes Announce Funding Secured for Local Literacy Programs, Call for Increased Investment in Literacy Training to Support Workforce Development

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY July 7, 2014

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION, JOBS & EMPLOYMENT, JOB TRAINING OR TRADES**



*Studies Show One in Three Residents of City of Buffalo are Functionally Illiterate; Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes are Urging More Investment in Literacy Programs to Combat Unemployment and Poverty in WNY.*

*Additional funding secured is enough to cover training costs for over 40 students.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy and Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes announced additional funding secured for Literacy New York-Buffalo Niagara, which provides vital literacy training to adults and youth in our community to help them attain higher levels of learning and pursue career opportunities. Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes helped secure an additional \$25,000 for the organization – enough to cover the training costs of over 40 additional students.

While the new funding is an important first step, Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes believe much more needs to be done to raise literacy levels in order to support workforce development and combat unemployment and poverty in Western New York. Illiteracy is a key factor preventing many individuals from accessing educational or career opportunities. That's why Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes are calling for increased investment in literacy programs to help area residents take advantage of the new jobs being created and opening up in our community.

“One in three Buffalo residents and one in five Erie County residents are functionally illiterate. Buffalo is a city on the move and our economy is in the midst of a rapid revitalization, but this is one of the lingering challenges that could bring the progress to a halt if we don't address it head on,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “Unfortunately, many hardworking men and women struggle to secure good-paying jobs or gain access job-training programs because of a lack of literacy skills, but we can overcome this obstacle if we invest in literacy training programs. Literacy is the key to unlocking the door to opportunity, and it's critical that we increase our investment in effective programs, like those offered by Literacy New York Buffalo-Niagara, which help improve the lives of hundreds of Western New Yorkers and their families every single year.”

“Literacy is an integral part of everyday life – from following directions for recipes to prepare meals, to paying bills. With all of the existing and forthcoming job opportunities, people

must be able to take advantage – and that only will happen if they can adequately read in order to fill out employment applications. Parents that can't read are more likely to have children that can't read well and are less likely to be able to find jobs to provide a stable home for their families. These funds will help provide assistance to 40 students to bring their reading levels up to par to qualify them for additional job training services. Statistics show that over 70 percent of adults and juveniles incarcerated have the lowest possible levels of reading proficiency. We must break the cycle," said **Assemblywoman Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes**.

"We are so grateful for the Legislature's support; these funds allow us to further our mission to open pathways to expanded opportunities for adult learners and school children by enhancing their literacy skills and nurturing their well-being," said **Literacy New York Buffalo-Niagara's Interim Chief Operations Officer Susan Shaft**. "We thank Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes for continuing to raise awareness about the tremendous need for our services. They have been true champions of the vital work we do in the community."

During this year's legislative session, Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes helped lead the fight for investment in literacy training as part of their ongoing efforts to improve workforce-development opportunities in Western New York. The additional \$25,000 secured this year for Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara was part of the \$1 million in additional funding directed to Literacy New York, the statewide organization that oversees Buffalo-Niagara and 34 other community-based affiliates.

Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes are now calling for a \$10 million investment in Literacy New York, which under similar formulas would result in about \$250,000 in funding for Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara. This would help cover literacy training costs for nearly 425 additional students, who would be better geared with the skills they need to pursue employment and job training.

One very specific example of Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara's work to connect Western New Yorkers to good jobs is their partnership with the Buffalo Center for Arts & Technology. BCAT provides career education for medical coding and pharmacy technicians, but to be eligible for the program, candidates are required to be reading at the 12th grade level. Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara provides pre-training literacy classes to help candidates achieve required literacy skills. Once candidates attain the 12th grade reading level, they gain access to BCAT's training programs, which are offered at no cost to participants and include internships with organizations that are almost always hiring, including Erie County Medical Center, Catholic Health Systems and Kaleida Health.

**Amber Dixon, Executive Director of the Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology**, said, "Our partnership with Literacy New York Buffalo-Niagara is critical to making certain adults have the tools to take advantage of Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology's training programs, and this support from Senator Kennedy, Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes and our other local representatives will make a significant impact on this city."

Local literacy statistics are sounding the alarm for increased investment in literacy training. In addition to the one in five Erie County residents and one in three Buffalo residents who are functionally illiterate, studies have shown that parents who don't read well are not likely to raise children who read well. Illiteracy becomes a cycle that must be broken with adult and youth literacy training. At the same time, 61 percent of low-income homes have no books in them, with nearly 45 percent of adults with the lowest literacy skills living in poverty. Also, 60 percent of prison inmates are illiterate, while 85 percent of juvenile offenders struggle with reading.

Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara – which provides the vast majority of its training programs with volunteer tutors – has been working to reverse those trends. They serve about 300 students annually, and they currently have 230 active volunteer tutors, who provided over

12,000 hours of tutoring and other volunteer work last year. Their programs have been proven effective – over 65 percent of students, who were tested before and after their training, showed sizable literacy gains. The increased funding secured this year – and the funding now under pursuit – will go a long way toward further strengthening this important and effective organization.

Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara has also been a driving force in helping refugees and new immigrants learn the English language after settling in Buffalo. Approximately 55 percent of their students are English language learners.

“The literacy skills learned through their programs have helped ease refugees’ and new immigrants’ transition into a new country with a new language,” Kennedy said. “This gives English language learners the chance to contribute to Western New York’s economy.”

Literacy NY Buffalo-Niagara is the region’s sole provider of free, one-on-one adult literacy services, as well as children’s programs, and provides reading and English language learning to anyone committed to improving his or her literacy skills.

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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>.*

*Assemblymember Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes represents the New York State Assembly's 141st District which covers a large portion of the city of Buffalo including sections of North Buffalo and Allentown, the entire East Side, Larkinville and the downtown central business district. More information is available at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Crystal-D-Peoples-Stokes>.*