



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Governor Cuomo Signs Senator Tim Kennedy's Legislation to Improve Statewide Child Abuse Hotline

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY September 24, 2014

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***Legislation Sponsored By Senator Kennedy Will Improve State Central Register Of Child Abuse By Enacting Strong Requirements For Tracking Of Repeat Reports.***

***State Review of Erie County CPS revealed that 72 percent of existing reports involved families with previous history of CPS investigations within the past four years.***

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Yesterday evening, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo signed into law legislation sponsored by Senator Tim Kennedy, which will significantly improve the statewide child abuse hotline by

requiring New York State to track repeated reports of abuse and neglect. Authored by Senator Tim Kennedy, the legislation (S.5942) will require the state Office of Children and Family Services to examine the previous call history of children named in suspected abuse reports and to transmit all prior records to the local Child Protective Services agency that investigates new allegations. This reform will ensure a more appropriate and thorough response from local CPS offices, and will provide for a more seamless and streamlined communications process between the state hotline and the local investigating offices.

“After the tragedies that Western New York has experienced in recent years, New York State undertook a top-to-bottom review of Erie County CPS,” said Senator Kennedy. “After their report revealed that a full 72 percent of existing reports involved families with a previous history of CPS investigations within the past four years, we saw a clear need to provide significant reforms to the Statewide Child Abuse Hotline – and this legislation will do just that. By ensuring that CPS workers are provided with critical information about previous reports, we will arm them with the tools they need to conduct more thorough investigations.”

“The future is in the hands of our children, we have to ensure that we treasure and protect them,” said Assemblymember Crystal Peoples-Stokes. In Erie County we need to provide case workers with resources that make their jobs easier. “Examining the call history provides critical information on cases, ultimately leading to more thorough and comprehensive investigations. This legislation also strengthens the Statewide Child Abuse Hotline; I would like to thank Governor Cuomo on signing this bill into law”

In addition to finding that 72 percent of existing reports involved families with a previous history of CPS investigations in the past four years, the state review of Erie County CPS also found that 24 percent of families had five or more previous reports.

By requiring OCFS to examine and transmit previous reports made to the state hotline, Senator Kennedy’s legislation will help ensure county CPS agencies conduct more thorough investigations by immediately providing caseworkers and investigators with necessary and complete information about children’s previous involvement with the state’s child protection system.

“If this legislation alerts CPS to even just one more case of child abuse, then we will have accomplished what we set out to do,” Kennedy said. “Assemblymember Peoples-Stokes and I reviewed the report produced by CPS and have proposed a set of legislation to provide real, tangible reforms to the child protective services system. This legislation is a vital piece of that legislative package, as it will gear child protective workers with the information they need to keep our kids safe.”

The State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment serves as a centralized, statewide take-in point for reports of suspected abuse or neglect. The state then relays allegations to local CPS agencies for investigation.

In order to appropriately and thoroughly investigate cases, child protective workers should review the full history of reports made to the central register involving both the children named in the report and the subject of the report. However, gaining access to those records is both very difficult and extremely time-consuming under current law. This takes workers' time and attention away from assessing the safety of children suspected of being abused or neglected.

OCFS maintains records of reports from across the state, and this legislation will ensure OCFS examines previous reports and immediately transmits any record of involvement with the child protective system to the local agency that is investigating the new allegations. All records from across the state will be immediately provided to the local CPS office conducting the current investigation. For example, OCFS would immediately transmit any previous reports from Monroe County to Erie County, if the family involved had lived in Rochester when previous calls were made but had moved to Buffalo when a new report was called in.

Kennedy's legislation will ensure child protective agencies have all necessary information to protect children at the start of their investigations, and it will provide workers with more time to commit to field work, as opposed to working through bureaucratic processes.

When caseworkers are made aware of prior history with the system, they will be able to better determine any protective actions to take or if they should provide preventive services to help families recover and grow stronger and safer.

Senator Kennedy also helped usher through the State Senate important CPS legislation that will require local Departments of Social Services to regularly and fully disclose workers' caseload numbers and to devise strategies to lower caseloads to the state-recommended level of 15 cases. This will prove especially vital to improving CPS locally, as some Erie County CPS workers have caseloads of about 50 – far exceeding state recommendations.

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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>.*