



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Take Action Now: Kennedy, Panepinto & Wozniak Call for Immediate Assembly Vote on Mixed Martial Arts Legislation

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY May 19, 2015



*As end of legislative session nears, WNY Senate and Assembly leaders, MMA advocates demand action on legislation to legalize MMA in NYS*

*Legislators push additional bill creating commission to regulate amateur MMA*

BUFFALO, NY – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo), Senator Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo) and Assemblywoman Angela Wozniak (R-Cheektowaga) stood together today to urge the Assembly to swiftly consider legislation to legalize Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) in New York State. With the legislation (S.2159) already having passed through the Senate this year and

the end of legislative session quickly approaching in June, members of the Western New York delegation says it's high time the Assembly vote on the bill (A.2604). Currently, New York State remains the only state in the United States to ban the sport on a professional level. Legislation to legalize it has passed through the Senate for the last six years, but has yet to be brought to the Assembly floor for a vote.

If legalized, New York State would feel a see a substantial economic boost. An independent study conducted just last year by HR&A Advisors, Inc. estimates that roughly 70 large and small-scale MMA events held throughout New York could generate approximately \$67 million in annual spending. Nearly half of that money is estimated to be generated upstate, and come from out-of-state visitors making purchases at restaurants, shops and hotels statewide. Additionally, more than 500 jobs are estimated to be needed to fully staff these events. This revenue impact would be welcome news to places such as Buffalo's burgeoning Cobblestone and Canalside districts.

"Legislation to legalize professional MMA has passed the Senate every year since I took office, and I've voted for it each time because I recognize the undeniable economic impact these sporting events bring," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "MMA is a wildly popular sport, with a large and loyal fan base. If legalized, people will come by the thousands to places like First Niagara Center, and the economic impact they will bring with them will be a knockout. Enough is enough- this legislation cannot stall yet again in the Assembly. With new leadership in place, I'm hopeful that the value of the legislation will finally be recognized, and Assemblymembers will capitalize on this opportunity to take action."

"For too many years New York State has finished last in the fight to legalize Mixed Martial Arts," said **Senator Marc Panepinto**. "With two key pieces of legislation once again on the table, the time to act is now. Failure to do so only continues to encourage residents to look to other states for entertainment. The benefits of legalizing mixed martial arts are two-fold. By

establishing a commission to regulate events we insure the safety of our athletes while strengthening the economy and providing entertainment to thousands. It is time for my colleagues in the Assembly to tape up and lead the charge. Let's let Ronda Rousey and others legally armbar their way to victory right here in Buffalo."

"With the legalization of mixed martial arts, the sport's unsafe reputation would finally be put to rest," said **Assemblywoman Angela Wozniak**. "We would then be able to regulate the sport so it is fair for all competitors. New York State is the only state in our nation that has not taken the initiative to capitalize on the potential of this growing sport. With the resignation of former Speaker Silver, a firm opponent of mixed martial arts, I am hopeful this sport will achieve the support it deserves in the Assembly."

"The legalization and regulation of mixed martial arts in New York State will serve as an economic driver in the tourism industry", said **Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes**. "Hospitality and tourism is a growing sector in Buffalo and Western New York; sporting events contribute to that growth. Hockey is serving as a catalyst for tourism; HarborCenter in downtown Buffalo hosted the International Ice Hockey Federation Under-18 Women's World Championship. Mixed martial art in New York State has the potential to replicate that success if made legal. I call on my colleagues in the legislature to continue making New York State more attractive to tourists and residents alike, and getting this legislation passed by the end of session."

"I am supportive of the Legalization of MMA and will be voting for this important economic driver," said **Assemblyman Mickey Kearns**. "Additionally, a Martial Arts Commission is necessary to protect our youth and those training as amateurs."

Currently, amateur MMA is legal in New York State, but it is unregulated. While many promoters are taking proper steps to ensure fighter safety, there is no law or advisory board

overseeing medical and drug testing, conducting background checks for instructors and mandating appropriate medical personnel on site at each event. Citing cases such as Antonio Staley, a registered sex offender who in 2011 was reported to be operating an MMA facility in Buffalo, the legislators emphasized the importance of implementing a governing body that can then regulate the issuance of credentials to operate academies.

Through additional MMA legislation (S.659/A.6515) sponsored by Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Wozniak, an amateur martial arts advisory commission would be created, which would be responsible for establishing regulations for amateur MMA instructors, schools, training and competitions. The commission would consist of seven members, who would be appointed by the Governor, the Senate and the Assembly, and who would be charged with overseeing safety standards at the amateur level.

“As we regulate the professional side of the sport, we must also ensure the safety of youth and other amateur players by creating a state commission to govern martial arts sports. We need to guarantee that they’re fighting under safe conditions and equipped with proper access to physicians and medical examinations,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “By introducing this legislation, we’re sending a strong message to amateur MMA athletes already competing across New York State that our attention isn’t only focused on the professional level, but that we’re just as dedicated to protecting their health and wellness.”

Assemblywoman Wozniak said, "I have sponsored legislation that would establish an amateur mixed martial arts commission, ensuring rules and regulations for instructors, schools and competitions are clearly identified and incorporated for all mixed martial arts competitors. Additionally, this legislation prohibits the employment of registered sex offenders so all participants' safety is guaranteed. I urge my Assembly colleagues to swiftly pass this legislation so New York State joins the rest of the country in legalizing this sport – mixed martial arts participants deserve safety and support in our state finally."

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