



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Following Two Deadly Accidents, Kennedy & Wozniak Call for NYSDOT to Act at Harlem Road & Walden Ave Intersection

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY July 22, 2015

| ISSUE: **TRANSPORTATION, HIGHWAYS**



*12-Year Old & 19-Year Old Killed in Span of Less Than 1 Year at Deadly Intersection, Study and Reforms Badly Needed Say Kennedy & Wozniak*

*Tens of Thousands Of Cars Compete With Bikers and Pedestrians Every Day – Intersection Requires an Overhaul*

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo,) and Assemblywoman Angela Wozniak (C-Cheektowaga,) were joined today by local leaders and activists at the corner of

Harlem Road and Walden Avenue, each a state road, in the Town of Cheektowaga to call for action from the New York State Department of Transportation to immediately begin to study and implement pedestrian safety measures at the intersection following the recent death of 19-year old Chelsea Chandler, the second young Cheektowaga resident to die at this intersection in the past 11 months. The intersection, through which tens of thousands of vehicles pass each day according to recent NYSDOT data, has become one of Cheektowaga's busiest and deadliest corners. In August, 2014, 12-year old Mujtoba Rafid was hit by two cars while biking through the intersection. In response, Kennedy and Wozniak are calling for an immediate study and the implementation of safety measures, including, but not limited to, pedestrian walkway alarms.

"Busy intersections can be a sign of a successful and bustling community," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "But that increased activity cannot come at the cost of the lives of pedestrians and bikers. Two young Cheektowaga residents killed at this dangerous intersections is two too many, and I am calling on the New York State Department of Transportation to act, and to act now. We need immediate safety measures implemented, along with a detailed study of this intersection to determine what permanent measures can be put in place to calm traffic and increase pedestrian safety. We owe it to the families of Chelsea Chandler and Mujtoba Rafid to ensure that their tragic deaths lead to meaningful reform."

"I am requesting the DOT perform a thorough study on this fatal intersection," said **Assemblywoman Wozniak**. "This intersection has now claimed two young and innocent lives and we cannot tolerate this kind of danger in our community. My thoughts and prayers go out to the Chandler family on their tragic loss."

"I have lived in this part of town most of my life and it has always been a residential walking community," said **Cheektowaga Supervisor Mary Holtz**. "With increased traffic, due to the commercial development along the Walden corridor, the Walden and Harlem intersection

has become increasingly dangerous for pedestrians. I join Senator Kennedy in asking New York State to make changes in the traffic patterns at this intersection to protect our residents.”

In a letter to NYSDOT Commissioner Matthew Driscoll, Kennedy noted that the two roads, which host tens of thousands of cars per day, see frequent pedestrian crossings to access the nearby NFTA bus stop, Thruway Shopping Plaza, and many of the other businesses. Both Kennedy and Wozniak’s letters to NYSDOT called for both a study, along with the implementation of pedestrian safety measures. In addition to pedestrian walkway alarms, they also suggested the addition of increased street lighting, proactive maintenance and replacement of burnt-out street lamp bulbs, and restructured traffic signals. Kennedy noted that the current lighting may not adequately illuminate the center lanes of both roads, leaving large patches of darkness where drivers may have difficulty seeing pedestrians. Regardless of what measures NYSDOT deems best-suited for the intersection, the two members of the State Legislature are calling for action to be taken as soon as possible.

The text of both Kennedy’s and Wozniak’s letters is below:

Commissioner Matthew Driscoll

NYS Department of Transportation

Main Office

50 Wolf Road

Albany, New York 12232

Dear Commissioner Driscoll:

I write in regards to serious safety concerns at the intersection at Harlem Road and Walden Avenue in the town of Cheektowaga. Following the recent and tragic death of two Cheektowaga residents, it is clear that the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) must revisit and upgrade the pedestrian safety features located at this intersection.

This busy intersection is the meeting of two multi-lane, heavily trafficked roads, with approximately 60,000 vehicles crossing each day. In addition to the heavy automobile traffic, the location also sees a great deal of pedestrian traffic, with people frequently crossing to access the nearby NFTA bus stop, Thruway Shopping Plaza or any of the other nearby businesses lining the streets. However, as pedestrian traffic has increased over recent years, increased safety measures have not been installed to adequately protect them. As a result, two young lives have been lost at this intersection in the last year, the most recent happening just this past weekend. In the wake of the most recent tragedy, I have heard from many of my constituents expressing their concerns and demanding action be taken to prevent future accidents from happening.

I strongly urge NYSDOT to study this intersection and take steps to install increased safety measures for pedestrians. There are several options that should be considered such as the immediate installation of pedestrian walkway alarms, increased street lighting and more proactive maintenance and replacement of burnt out street lamp bulbs. With both Harlem Rd. and Walden Ave. having multiple lanes, the current street lighting fails to adequately illuminate the full span of the street. As a result, drivers may be inhibited from seeing crossing pedestrians with enough time to react and prevent collision. In addition to

increased lighting, it is equally important that the maintenance and replacement of burnt out bulbs be executed in a timely fashion, so that they can be seen by pedestrians and motorists alike. While I am open to a number of potential solutions to this public safety hazard, it is without question that attention must be given to this intersection and action must be taken to further protect crossing pedestrians.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and I look forward to hearing from you. Should you have any questions, or if I may be of assistance, please contact me in my district office at (716) 826-2683.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District

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Matthew J. Driscoll, Commissioner

New York State Department of Transportation

NYSDOT Main Office

50 Wolf Road

Albany, NY 12232

Dear Commissioner Driscoll:

I am writing this letter in regards to two separate traffic incidents that occurred in my Assembly District over the last year.

On August 4, 2014, a 12 year old boy was hit and killed crossing Harlem Road at the Walden Avenue intersection in the Town of Cheektowaga (Erie County). Sadly, last night a 19 year old girl was killed at the very same intersection.

At this time, I am respectfully requesting a traffic study of this intersection be conducted by local Department of Transportation personnel as soon as possible. In addition, I would appreciate your help in ordering the immediate instillation of pedestrian crossing alarms at this intersection. There is certainly an ongoing problem in this area that needs to be addressed so no other children are hurt.

I would appreciate your assistance with matter. Please feel free to contact me with any additional questions or comments. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Angela M. Wozniak

Member of Assembly

143<sup>rd</sup> District

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