



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## On First Day of School, Kennedy Stresses School Bus Safety & Calls For Increased Penalties for Drivers Who Repeatedly Endanger Lives of Children

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY September 8, 2015

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*With 50,000 Drivers Estimated to Illegally Pass School Buses Every Day, Senator Stands with Teachers & Parents to Encourage Increased Driver Awareness*

*Kennedy Sponsored Legislation Would Raise Fines & Jail Time for Drivers Caught Passing Stopped School Buses Three Times in Three Years*

CHEEKTOWAGA, NY – As students in Cheektowaga head back to school today, Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) stood with Cheektowaga Central Schools Superintendent Dennis Kane, Cheektowaga police and parents from the district to detail legislation targeting drivers who are convicted of repeatedly failing to yield to school buses, and consequently endanger the lives of children. Under New York State law, motorists are required to stop for school buses picking up children or dropping them off. Kennedy's bill, S.770, increases the maximum penalties drivers could face for passing a stopped school bus three times within three years.

According to SafeNY, an estimated 50,000 drivers illegally pass school buses across New York every day. Currently, first time offenders face a fine of anywhere from \$250-\$400, up to 30 days in prison, or both. Those who are convicted of a second violation within three years could be slapped with fines ranging from \$600-\$750, up to six months in prison, or both. If a driver is convicted of yet a third violation within three years, he or she could face fines of \$750-\$1,000 and/or up to six months in prison. Under Kennedy's legislation, penalties for a third violation would increase the fine up to \$2,000 and the prison term up to one year, or both.

"So many kids across Western New York are excited to head back to school, and we need to make sure that we're getting them there safely," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "New York State transports 2.3 million children on thousands of school buses every year. We urge drivers to be aware of the increase in school buses on the roads, and to obey the law. If you see a bus stopped with its lights flashing and signs out, you are required to stop. For those who choose to repeatedly and egregiously violate this law, and jeopardize the safety of our kids, you can expect to pay up and spend time where you belong- off the streets and behind bars."

"It's especially important this time of year when school buses return to the road that drivers be mindful of our children's safety," said **Cheektowaga Central School District Superintendent Dennis Kane**. "We will continue to do everything we can to promote awareness for the safety

of our children, including support tougher consequences for people who don't stop for the flashing red lights of a school bus.”

Additionally, the legislation creates a new, stronger charge - vehicular manslaughter in the third degree - when a person passes a stopped school bus and ends up hitting and killing a child under 15. Currently, drivers who commit this act may be charged with criminally negligent homicide. By amending state law, the offense is more appropriately defined and clarified, and convicted drivers could potentially face stronger penalties, with a jail term of up to four years.

SafeNY provides additional tips for safely sharing the road with school buses below:

- *Watch for children who cross in front of the bus when attempting to board or leave.*
- *Be mindful of children at bus stops, as well as any who may be running to a stop.*
- *Remember: buses make frequent stops. Be prepared to stop with them.*
- *School buses are required by law to stop at all railroad crossings.*

“A stopped school bus, replete with bright flashing lights and swing-out stop signs, is a difficult sight to miss,” added Kennedy. “For those who continue to flagrantly ignore these clear signs and put our children at risk, the law needs to send a message that a bright stop sign isn’t successfully delivering. This legislation will accomplish exactly that.”

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