



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Education Department Launches Investigation into Allegations of Child Abuse on Buffalo School Buses Weeks After Kennedy Calls for Comprehensive State Probe into Incidents

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY February 23, 2016

| ISSUE: **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS, BUSES, CHILD ABUSE**

NYSED Informs Senator of Pending Investigation Just Weeks After He Penned Letter to Commissioner, Asking for Thorough Investigation into Alleged Cases of Sexual Abuse Involving 6-year-old Boy and 9-year-old Boy on Buffalo Public Schools Buses

Department Oversees Qualifications for Hiring School Bus Drivers, Monitors and Attendants; Responsible for School District Provision of Student Transportation Services

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Weeks after Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) called on New York State Education Department Commissioner MaryEllen Elia to launch an investigation into the recent allegations of sexual abuse of a 6-year-old and 9-year-old child on Buffalo school buses, Elia has informed Kennedy that a state investigation is now underway. In a new letter, Elia says she has directed the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute to investigate the abuse allegations raised on the school bus. The Institute, which is contracted by the Department, is responsible for reviewing all allegations of fraud, waste and abuse in pupil transportation operations.

“Our children deserve to be protected without question, both in and outside the classroom. While these allegations of abuse continue to be investigated by authorities, I’m grateful that

Commissioner Elia has heard our call and ordered an additional state investigation,” said Senator Tim Kennedy. “We cannot allow our children’s right to an education to become jeopardized. We have a responsibility to ensure that our students’ safety is a top priority, and if the safety standards of our school buses are found to have been inadequate in this circumstance, I trust that the Commissioner will expand her investigation to look at the greater gaps and the need statewide.”

Kennedy’s call for an investigation comes while police and school officials with the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo continue to investigate allegations that a 6-year-old boy was sexually abused by a 12-year-old while riding a Buffalo school bus back in December. A local parent group has since filed a federal complaint, and is pushing for the Buffalo Public Schools to require bus aides on every school bus. In a separate case, the mother of a 9-year-old South Buffalo elementary school student claimed that her son was physically and sexually assaulted on a school bus without an aide back in November.

In his January letter to Elia, Kennedy also asked for a thorough look into any incidents of abuse or violence reported on school buses over the past year, and an examination into whether bus aides should have been present at the time of the alleged incidents.

In her letter, Elia noted that NYSED has created a new position, the Director of Pupil Transportation, which is responsible for improving training for student transportation drivers to ensure that safety and efficiency is prioritized. Additionally, Elia said the Director will begin conducting safety audits of local school districts and bus contractors to guarantee that all regulations are being met.

Currently, NYSED oversees school district provision of transportation for students attending both public and nonpublic schools. The department also has authority over hiring qualifications for school bus drivers, monitors and attendants, and administers an annual

School Bus Driver Safety Training Program, which educates employees on safety protocols. According to its website, approximately 2.3 million students ride 50,000 school buses each day across New York State.

You can find the full text of Elia's response to Kennedy attached.

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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>.