



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Highway Robbery: After Numerous Constituents Report Outrageous Late Fees on Grand Island Tolls, Kennedy Calls on Thruway Authority to Implement Amnesty Program & Pushes for Passage of Legislation

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY August 20, 2018

| ISSUE: **CASHLESS TOLLING, THRUWAY AUTHORITY, GRAND ISLAND BRIDGE TOLLS**



Kennedy Pens Letter to NYSTA, Urges Authority to Implement Program Similar to his Legislation, Which Would Create Six Month Amnesty Program

## Several Constituents Have Contacted Kennedy's Office, With Late Fees Reaching into the Hundreds of Dollars - All For a One Dollar Toll

GRAND ISLAND, NY - Senator Tim Kennedy stood today with Western New Yorkers who have received outrageous and excessive fines from the New York State Thruway Authority since the implementation of cashless tolling at the Grand Island Bridges to call on the Authority to reevaluate existing regulations. Kennedy has authored legislation that would create a six month amnesty program following the implementation of cashless tolling at new locations. While the legislature remains out of session until January, Kennedy is calling on the Thruway Authority to unilaterally create a similar program in the meantime. The proposal is not without precedent. After the opening of the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge downstate, a temporary amnesty program was created while travelers adjusted to the new system. Constituents of Kennedy reported receiving late fees and fines totaling hundreds of dollars.

"The Grand Island Bridge costs one dollar to cross," said **Senator Kennedy**. "While everyone who crosses these bridges has an obligation to pay their fair share, the idea that a late one dollar toll can balloon into hundreds of dollars in fees and fines - especially so quickly - is ridiculous. Cashless tolling was supposed to eliminate the headache of wait times, but it appears that for some that headache has been replaced with a bureaucratic nightmare. I urge the Thruway Authority to take a close look at their existing regulations and implement serious reform. An amnesty program is clearly warranted while Western New Yorkers adjust to this new system."

"I am disappointed that the Thruway Authority appears to be so tone deaf to the needs of Western New York motorists during the transition to cashless tolling," said **State Senator Chris Jacobs**. "Drivers crossing the Grand Island bridges should be afforded an amnesty period just like the one used on the Tappan Zee Bridge, and any fines that ultimately get

levied should be more reasonable and commensurate with the one dollar toll.”

“We fought hard for cashless tolling, and we are excited about the change,” said **Grand Island Supervisor Nate McMurray**. “A toll system should not be enforced, however, in ways that exploit residents, tourists, or commuters. I strongly support measures that prevent these hardworking individuals from being gouged by excessive violation fees. I will fight for them the same way I fought for cashless tolling.”

“When I crossed the Grand Island Bridges three times earlier this year, I expected to pay what I’ve always paid: one dollar,” said Buffalo resident **Marcus Kelly**. “I had no idea that, ultimately, I’d end up paying over \$50 per crossing because of late fees, totalling \$153. I understand everyone has to pay their toll, but this is a new system. I appreciate Senator Kennedy recognizing this, and I hope that the Thruway Authority agrees with him and creates an amnesty program while everyone gets used to this new cashless tolling system.”

“I crossed the Grand Island Bridges four times in the past few months, and inadvertently racked up \$200 in late fees,” said Buffalo resident **Briana Harrington**. “I’m not asking for special treatment, or trying to avoid paying tolls that we all pay - but while we all adjust to a new system, it only makes sense that we should have an amnesty period. I appreciate Senator Kennedy pushing the Thruway Authority to make this right.”

In addition to his legislation to reform cashless tolling, Kennedy also cosponsors legislation that would eliminate all tolls on the Grand Island Bridges.

The text of Kennedy’s letter is below:

August 20, 2018

Matthew J. Driscoll, Acting Executive Director

200 Southern Blvd.

P.O. Box 189

Albany, NY 12201-0189

Dear Executive Director Driscoll,

Over the past several weeks, my office has been contacted by multiple constituents who have encountered unacceptable difficulties with the recently-implemented cashless tolling system at the Grand Island Bridges. These constituents, who have exercised their right not to utilize E-ZPass, have been hit with late fees ranging into the hundreds of dollars. Many Western New Yorkers choose not to use E-ZPass, and they have been unfairly hurt while adjusting to a new system. I am urging the Thruway Authority to immediately review its policies and procedures to create an amnesty program similar to legislation that I have proposed (S8134).

One constituent from Buffalo was hit with a \$158 fine, while another was notified that they owe a total of \$204. My legislation would create a six-month window following passage that would allow that these fees to be waived. For the constituent with the \$158 fine, he would instead owe the \$3 it began as, for the three times he crossed. While this legislation remains pending, I urge the Thruway Authority to unilaterally implement these guidelines in order to protect drivers from excessive and onerous fees, just as it recently did when an amnesty program was created for the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge.

Cashless tolling was supposed to relieve the headache of waits at the Grand Island Bridges. While it has helped ease congestion, these changes should not come at outrageous and

unforgiving cost to drivers. I urge you to review NYSTA's toll fee policies and procedures and to create an amnesty program to allow drivers the opportunity to pay their toll fairly. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, as always, I welcome your call.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2017-S8134**

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- Introduced
  
- ◦ In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
  
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
  
- ◦ Passed Assembly

- Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to creating a cashless tolling amnesty program

April 06, 2018

In Senate Committee [Transportation](#)

Sponsored by [Timothy M. Kennedy](#)

Do you support this bill?