



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Tim Kennedy Joins Visit Buffalo Niagara, Buffalo Niagara Partnership, and WNY Hospitality Leaders to Unveil New Statewide Legislation Aimed at Fueling Tourism Recovery Following Devastation from COVID-19 Pandemic

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY September 17, 2020

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BUFFALO, NY – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) joined Visit Buffalo Niagara President Patrick Kaler, Buffalo Niagara Partnership President Dottie Gallagher, and tourism leaders across Western New York Thursday to unveil an innovative new funding concept designed to aid tourism industries statewide who are suffering from the impact of the COVID-19

pandemic and the lack of federal assistance eligibility. The new Senate and Assembly bill [S8938/A10801](#), proposed by Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre (D-Long Island) respectively, would support the establishment of Tourism Recovery Improvement Districts across New York State, enabling local municipalities to opt to create a dedicated funding stream that would create a path towards vital relief to Western New York and New York State's tourism economy.

Tourism in Erie County is a \$1.8 billion industry. As of June, job losses in the hospitality and retail trade sectors accounted for 41% of the nearly 33,000 workforce. The U.S. Travel Association estimates \$505 billion in losses for the travel industry through the end of 2020 due to the pandemic, and 40% of excess U.S. unemployment listed in the Leisure and Hospitality sector. In May of 2019, hotels in New York State had a 76.7% occupancy rate; one year later in May 2020, this same occupancy rate was nearly halved to 35.9%. Tourism Recovery Improvement Districts would be created by local governments for the purpose of raising revenue through assessments on businesses that would benefit from district improvements, marketing, and advertising. Should businesses representing more than 50% of the proposed revenue object to the plan, no district would be created.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on New York's hospitality and tourism industries, creating a rippling financial effect on cities and businesses statewide," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "Through the introduction of this legislation, Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre and I aim to mitigate that loss of revenue by allowing municipalities to create tourism recovery districts - a concept that is already supported by dozens of businesses, from Western New York to Long Island. In partnership with Visit Buffalo Niagara, Buffalo Niagara Partnership, and Discover Long Island, we look forward to moving this legislation forward, and creating a new stream of revenue and opportunity for New York's economy."

"The coronavirus pandemic has had devastating consequences for New York's tourism industry, especially here on Long Island. At a time of great economic uncertainty, this legislation will generate critically needed revenue for local tourism initiatives that will help boost local economies and support our small businesses which are the bedrock of our communities. I am thankful to have strong partners in Senator Kennedy, Visit Buffalo Niagara, Discover Long Island and every other impacted stakeholder on this important measure and I look forward to continuing to work together in the coming months to help ensure tourism in New York comes back stronger than ever before," said **Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre**.

"The restaurants, hotels, small businesses and non-profit attractions that are the heart and soul of Erie County's hospitality industry have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic," said **Patrick Kaler, President and CEO of Visit Buffalo Niagara**. "Thousands of our fellow citizens have lost their jobs and the spending power that ripples throughout the community. The establishment of a Tourism Recovery Improvement District would help re-start this economic engine and get people back to work. We're grateful to Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre for their advocacy and leadership in proposing this innovative funding mechanism."

"Erie County has long needed a solely dedicated source of tourism promotion funding and there is no greater need than right now," said **Dottie Gallagher, President & CEO of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership**. "The COVID-19 pandemic has turned our economy upside down, and the hospitality and tourism industry has been especially devastated. Creating a TRID is not just important to the vitality of our local tourism sector and the sales tax it generates for our community, but it is also key to improving Buffalo Niagara's brand which remains a critical component of our regional workforce attraction efforts and our long term economic recovery."

“The hospitality industry is central to our regional economic development and its recovery in the coming months and years is critical to NYS. Buffalo is a world-class destination which is internationally recognized for its architecture and art. These are significant drivers bringing visitors from outside the region into WNY and our state,” said **Mary Roberts, Executive Director of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Martin House**. “This legislation and the resultant funding will enable our ability to promote and leverage this destination and its cultural assets.”

“The entire Hospitality Industry, including our hotels, restaurants, attractions, bars and cultural agencies as well as the thousands of employees in those industries are deeply appreciative of Senator Kennedy’s leadership and support of the Tourism Recovery Act,” said **Jon Dandes, Corporate Vice President of Governmental Relations and Special Products for Rich Products, as well as past president of Rich Baseball Operations, past chair of Visit Buffalo Niagara, past president of the WNY Restaurant Association and Chair of the Buffalo Zoo**. “This legislation is critical to helping our Industry recover from the pandemic and will provide the necessary help to put our industry back to work and stabilize these organizations.”

To voice support for this initiative, please contact [info@visitbuffaloniagara.com](mailto:info@visitbuffaloniagara.com).

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