



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Announces Funds Secured for At-Risk Youth

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY March 22, 2013

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*Kennedy confirms budget includes funding for Operation SNUG, Court Appointed Special Advocates program.*

*Kennedy: This minimal state investment will have a tremendous community impact helping at-risk youth avoid destructive decisions.*

ALBANY, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, today announced funding for two critical programs that support at-risk youth – Operation SNUG and the Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program – will be included in the 2013-14 state budget plan. Over the last

several weeks, Kennedy has been pushing to ensure resources for these important initiatives are included in the final budget plan. When the proposed budget was first unveiled in January, neither program was scheduled for funding in the next fiscal year.

**Operation SNUG** – which is guns spelled backwards – aims to reverse local trends in violent crime and gang activity. The **CASA program** provides volunteer advocates for abused and neglected children in foster care and the family court system. Kennedy says the state will allocate \$3 million to re-launch Operation SNUG programs across the state, and CASA will receive a full restoration of the \$800,000 that was previously zeroed out for its statewide operations.

“This minimal state investment will have a tremendous community impact helping at-risk youth avoid destructive decisions,” Kennedy said. “Growing up these days isn’t easy, but with effective programs like Operation SNUG and CASA, children and youth will have the support they need to stay out of trouble, complete their educations and grow up to raise their own families and help our community thrive.”

Lawmakers are expected to start voting on the budget this weekend.

While the specific focus of each program is different, SNUG and CASA share a collective goal of helping young people succeed and keeping our community safe and strong. When SNUG was funded previously, it helped curb gang activity in Buffalo and communities across the state. Officials from the Community Action Organization of Erie County reported that before the program’s funding ran dry, Operation SNUG helped reduce street violence in the 14215 and 14211 zip-code areas in Buffalo.

“In 2012, homicides were up by nearly 40 percent in the City of Buffalo. We called for state action to help stop the violence, and now new actions will be taken,” Kennedy said. “Re-

launching Operation SNUG will help cut down on gang activity in Buffalo and make cities across the state safer.”

SNUG programs utilize grassroots neighborhood outreach, public awareness campaigns and community mobilization to engage youth and deter gang activity. It’s a hands-on, street-level approach to prevent violence by shifting attitudes and interrupting disputes before they spiral out of control.

When he heard funding for CASA had been cut, Kennedy feared that elimination of this important program would prevent hundreds of at-risk youth from having access to an advocate that guides them through the court system. Kennedy fought to restore funding for the program to help ensure children and survivors of abuse have access to the support and services they need to avoid destructive decisions.

“When children suffer abuse or neglect, the state needs to be there for them. With three young children at home, my heart aches when kids have go through the family court system or foster care,” Kennedy said. “Young survivors of abuse or neglect deserve the helping hand and supportive voice that the CASA program provides.”

At \$3 million and \$800,000 respectively, Operation SNUG and CASA carry very minimal price tags compared to the tremendous impact they make in the lives of individual young people and the community as a whole.

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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>.*