



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

With Funding to be Restored, Senator Kennedy Praises WNY Families of People with Developmental Disabilities for Fighting Cuts to OPWDD Services

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY June 18, 2013

| ISSUE: **FAMILIES, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

Image not found or type unknown



Kennedy announces Senate approval of legislation he cosponsored to restore state budget cuts to vital services for people with developmental disabilities. Assembly approved it Monday.

Kennedy: The bill we passed restores critical funding that represents a vital lifeline to the most vulnerable among us. Congratulations to all of the families and advocates, and thank you for your passionate persistence.

ALBANY, N.Y. – As the Senate voted to approve legislation to restore funding to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, praised the local families who stood up to fight state budget cuts that had been previously imposed on services that people with developmental disabilities rely on.

Senator Kennedy joined rallies with local families, lobbied the Governor with a passionate plea for restoration, grilled the OPWDD commissioner about the state's plans and stood with his colleagues in the Senate Democratic Conference to push a hostile amendment in a final attempt to reverse the cuts during the budget process.

Those efforts resulted in a partial restoration of the proposed funding cuts, but there still remained a substantial cut to OPWDD services. However, local families and individuals with developmental disabilities refused to rest until the budget cuts were fully restored. With Senator Kennedy's support, they continued to raise their voices and kept up the pressure in the State Capitol. Now, as a result of their relentless advocacy, legislation – which Senator Kennedy cosponsored – has passed the Senate and Assembly to restore funding to OPWDD.

“With all of the partisan wrangling and regional contention that happens in a town like Albany, important causes like this sometimes get drowned out. But we refused to let this issue – the protection of thousands of New Yorkers with developmental disabilities – get ignored. We kept fighting despite long odds, and today marks an important step on the path toward victory,” said **Senator Kennedy**. “In Western New York, advocates and local families of people with developmental disabilities demanded that they be heard, and they would not rest until we got each and every state lawmaker to pay attention. I was proud to stand with the families who led this fight, and I was privileged to have the opportunity to work with them to lobby for the support they deserve.

“It took some time, but we kept telling the families: ‘It’s never too late to do the right thing. Keep fighting, and make them hear you,’” he added. “Today, after all of the letters, rallies, protests and petitions, our call has finally been heard. Persistence paid off. The legislation we passed will restore critical funding that represents a vital lifeline to the most vulnerable among us.

“Days like today, announcements like this and victories won for ordinary New Yorkers facing extraordinary challenges are why I chose to enter public service. I am overjoyed that this bill has finally been approved by both houses of the Legislature and that the Governor has already indicated his intention to sign it into law. Thank you to Governor Cuomo and my legislative colleagues for your compassion and leadership. Most importantly, congratulations to all of the advocates and families, and a very special thank you to the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York for your determination and passion. You remind us of what’s really important in life and inspire us each and every day to serve others.”

While the final enacted budget contained a substantial funding cut for OPWDD services, it also contained language directing a workgroup to develop a savings plan in an attempt to minimize the impact of the funding cut.

The savings plan was finalized by the workgroup at the end of March. This bill restores funding up to \$90 million to fill the funding gap that remains after the cost-savings initiatives are put into effect. The savings plan aims to protect services for individuals with developmental disabilities, while reducing extraneous, duplicative or bureaucratic overhead costs.

###

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>.