



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Delivers State Funding to Combat Gang Violence in Buffalo

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY February 5, 2014

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*After Kennedy's successful effort to re-launch Operation SNUG, new state resources are coming to Buffalo and WNY to make our community safer.*

*A grant of \$366,400, through state's Operation SNUG, will support neighborhood-based violence prevention project.*

*Kennedy: With the support we secured through Operation SNUG, our community will have the chance to ramp up our relentless efforts to prevent crime and make our neighborhoods safer.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, today announced a major state investment that will help prevent street violence and curb gang activity in the City of Buffalo. This funding, which Senator Kennedy helped secure during the 2013-14 state budget process, will be directed to Western New York to help improve the safety and quality of life in Buffalo neighborhoods. Kennedy said a grant of \$366,400 has been awarded to the Back to Basics Outreach Ministries, through the state's Operation SNUG program, to support a targeted neighborhood violence prevention project.

During last year's budget process, Senator Kennedy led the fight to reinstate funding for an anti-violence program known as Operation SNUG, which has helped curb gang activity in communities across the state. Operation SNUG – which is guns spelled backwards – aims to reverse local trends in violent crime and gang activity. Funding for the program had been zeroed-out, but Kennedy helped secure a restoration of funding for the program in last year's budget.

New York State will direct Operation SNUG funding to Back to Basics Outreach Ministries to establish a Cure Violence gang intervention program – which will be supported by the Buffalo Peacemakers. Through this project, Back to Basics – with key support from the Buffalo Peacemakers – will carry out life-saving work to prevent shootings and other violent crime, while seeking to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods throughout Buffalo.

“Gang violence has threatened the safety of our streets. Gunfire has torn through our homes and parks, and local families have had to endure the devastating consequences of death and destruction. Enough is enough,” said **Senator Kennedy**. “This neighborhood violence prevention project presents a new way forward. With the support we secured through Operation SNUG, our community will have the chance to ramp up our efforts to prevent crime and make our neighborhoods safer.

“This funding will target neighborhoods hardest hit by street violence and apply a tried-and-tested model of street outreach and violence intervention to cut down on gang activity and reduce violent crime from the frontlines,” Kennedy added. “Because of our successful fight to re-launch Operation SNUG, Buffalo and Western New York will have new funding to put violence interrupters to work in our community, intervening in potentially violent situations and striving to calm disputes before they turn deadly.”

“We are dedicated to making our community safer for the men and women who call Buffalo home. We’re working hard to stop the violence and prevent crime, and we want to thank Senator Kennedy for working hard to help us secure this state investment for our program,” said **Pastor James E. Giles, executive director of Back to Basics**. “Senator Kennedy recognizes the importance of the work we do, and has been ready and willing to help us support the community. These state resources will allow us to implement a Cure Violence program, enhance the work of the Buffalo Peacemakers and keep violence interrupters on the streets looking out for our neighbors and preventing crime.”

With their SNUG grant, Back to Basics will establish a Cure Violence program focused combating gang activity and improving neighborhood safety. This effort will enhance the work of the Buffalo Peacemakers, and it will put violence interrupters and outreach workers on the streets to intervene in potentially violent situations, provide security at community events and gathering places and connect youth with programs that provide opportunities to change the trajectory of their lives.

Kennedy said Operation SNUG grants will be administered by the state Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Back to Basics is one of seven groups across the state that have received state funding to implement a coordinated, community-based strategy that seeks to prevent violent crime and encourage high-risk youth to avoid criminal activity and instead pursue positive opportunities. The state today announced \$2 million in funding for

Operation SNUG projects statewide.

SNUG programs, under the Cure Violence model, utilize grassroots neighborhood outreach, public awareness campaigns and community mobilization to engage youth, alter the mindset and transform local norms. It's a hands-on, street-level approach to prevent violence by shifting attitudes, changing ways of thinking and interrupting disputes before they spiral out of control. In addition to the street outreach workers and violence interrupters employed by the program, Operation SNUG partners with community leaders, local activists, faith-based leaders and law enforcement officials in a cooperative effort to prevent violence.

It's an innovative idea, but it's not new to New York State. In 2009, the State Legislature allocated \$4 million to implement Operation SNUG in eight cities across the state. Buffalo was one of those cities. The program demonstrated initial success, but after the original funding allocation was depleted, most operations were forced to shut down.

In Erie County, Operation SNUG led to a marked decline in street violence in the 14215 and 14211 zip-code areas in Buffalo, according to officials from the Community Action Organization. In Albany, shootings dropped by 29 percent during the first eight months of Operation SNUG. In Rochester, there was a 40 percent decline in shooting victims over the course of SNUG's first six months, and violent altercations fell to a 10-year low in targeted neighborhoods. And in the Chicago neighborhood where Cure Violence – a model-program that inspired New York's efforts – was launched, shootings were decreased 67 percent in its first year.

"We fought hard to secure funding to re-launch Operation SNUG, knowing that when done right, this anti-violence model has been proven to prevent shootings and ultimately save lives," Kennedy said. "This up-front investment in violence prevention will strengthen our

community and can lead to substantial savings for taxpayers. It will reduce incarceration costs by stopping crime before it happens, boost property values by improving neighborhood safety and inspire young people to be forces of positive change here in the City of Buffalo.”

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate’s 63rd District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*