



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

At March Against Child Abuse, Senator Kennedy Announces Increased Funding Secured to Prevent Child Abuse and Support Victims

Timothy M. Kennedy

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After Senator Kennedy led budget fight to increase support for Child Advocacy Center in Buffalo and centers across the state, funding rises by \$2.57 million, a 43 percent increase.

Kennedy: Our state and nation are facing an epidemic of child abuse, and it is urgent for us all to take action to stop abuse and neglect, once and for all.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, announced new funding secured in the state budget to strengthen the fight against child abuse and support victims' healing at the Million March Against Child Abuse today in Buffalo. Following Senator Kennedy's push for increased state support for Child Advocacy Centers in Western New York and across the state, funding will rise by \$2.57 million in this year's budget, an increase of about 43 percent over last year. Senator Kennedy said the increased funding will strengthen the vital work of the Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center, a program of Child and Adolescent Treatment Services, which takes an innovative, collaborative approach to respond to child abuse and support victims.

Close to 200 Western New Yorkers gathered for the Million March Against Child Abuse today in Delaware Park. Over 100 cities across the nation held similar marches to call for an end to child abuse and neglect.

“In New York State and across our nation, we are facing an epidemic of child abuse, and it is urgent for us all to take action to stop abuse and neglect, once and for all. This increased funding for the Child Advocacy Center is a long overdue step in the right direction,” said Senator Tim Kennedy. “About 80,000 children become victims of abuse or neglect every year in New York State, and here in Western New York, tragedy has struck far too many times in recent months. Too many children have suffered and died, and too many families have been left mourning. Enough is enough. This 43 percent increase in funding for Child Advocacy Centers across our state will ensure more children are served and protected by their lifesaving programs. It will help law enforcement and prosecutors secure justice for children and their families, and support the healing of New York State’s most vulnerable.”

The Child Advocacy Center improves community response to child abuse through multi-system collaboration, bringing together child protection services, prosecutors, police agencies as well as specially-trained medical and mental health professionals to address the needs of abused children and their families. With a child-friendly coordinated response, this program helps children heal successfully and protects them from further victimization by promoting the effective prosecution of alleged offenders. The funding secured by Senator Kennedy and the Legislature will protect the program and enhance their efforts to serve local children.

Judith Olin, director of Buffalo's Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center, a program of Child and Adolescent Treatment Services, said, “The additional funding greatly aids us in our mission to reduce trauma, promote accountability and facilitate healing for children who have been abused. We are grateful to the Legislature for recognizing the importance of Child Advocacy Centers and for providing this increased funding to support our fight to stop child abuse.”

The Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center on Franklin Street in Buffalo and the Child Advocacy Centers across the state have proven to be critical assets for our state’s efforts to respond to and prevent child abuse. Because of their effectiveness, Child Advocacy Centers are now set up across the state. From 16 CAC’s in 2007, there are now 40 Child Advocacy Centers statewide, which are uniquely geared to investigate child abuse cases and help keep children safe.

The number of children CAC's serve has also surged upward, from 10,763 in 2007 up to an estimated 18,500 in 2013. However, over that same time span, their funding from the state had plummeted by 25.6 percent to a low of \$5.2 million in 2011. They

had recovered slightly, up to \$5.98 million in 2013, and now this year, their state funding finally increased to levels better suited to meet the needs of the thousands of children they serve.

Senator Kennedy, with the support of his colleagues in the Legislature, secured an additional \$2.57 million for Child Advocacy Centers, bringing their total state funding up to \$8.55 million, an increase of about 43 percent.

Senator Kennedy launched the fight for new funding during a public hearing on the state's human services budget in February when he called on Sheila Poole, acting commissioner of the state Office of Children and Family Services, to support a substantial increase in funding for CAC's across the state.

In addition to saving lives, Child Advocacy Centers also save money. Studies show that multi-disciplinary team investigations save as much as \$1,000 per case when compared with the cost of traditional investigations.

Senator Kennedy also renewed his call for comprehensive legislation that he and Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes are pursuing to improve Child Protective Services at the march Saturday.

The legislation proposed by Kennedy and Peoples-Stokes is gaining traction in Albany. Their proposals include:

- Ensuring Child Protective Services workers are trained and prepared for their unique and challenging work.
- New accountability by strengthening involvement of mandated reporters in CPS investigations.
- Reforming excessive corporal punishment statutes to ensure deeper investigations when violent, extreme and senseless corporal punishment is reported.
- Reforming protocols for the interviewing of children in suspected abuse cases to ensure more accurate and thorough investigations.
- Strengthening the statewide child abuse hotline to track repeat reports of abuse.
- Improving investigations and ensuring accountability by requiring photographic evidence be gathered during caseworker visits.

At Buffalo's Million March Against Child Abuse last year, several speakers called on the State Legislature to pass Jay-J's Law, a bill authored by Senator Kennedy to toughen penalties against child abusers. In the months that followed, the Senate and Assembly passed the legislation and Governor Cuomo signed it into law. With the support of families and advocates from Western New York, Kennedy is confident more progress will come this year in the ongoing fight to end child abuse and neglect.

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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>.