



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## **Protect Our Kids: Senator Kennedy Announces Legislation to Streamline CPS Passes Out of Committee, Ready for Consideration of Full Senate**

Timothy M. Kennedy

April 29, 2015

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*Kennedy-sponsored Legislation Designed to Streamline CPS Gains Momentum in Albany, Passes Through Key Committee*

*Bill Allows Doctors, Nurses and Law Enforcement to Bypass Abuse Hotline, Report Child Maltreatment Directly to CPS*

BUFFALO, NY – As Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) continues his push to improve Child Protective Services in Western New York and across New York State, he announced new progress today on a key reform to further streamline the process for reporting child abuse. Kennedy helped an important bill that improves the coordination between medical personnel and Child Protective Services workers secure approval from the Senate Finance Committee, which moves it toward a vote before the full Senate.

Currently, when medical personnel, social workers or law enforcement call the State Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment hotline to report abuse, they are screened and a determination is made by hotline staff on whether to forward the report to the local department. Under the bill, of which Kennedy is a co-sponsor ([S.1902](#)), their report of abuse or neglect would immediately be referred to the local Child Protective Services department for investigation. Furthermore, the bill requires CPS departments in each county to establish a set of standards and procedures to strengthen the coordination and communication with hospitals and law enforcement, to protect at-risk children in their care.

“This common-sense reform to our statewide CPS system is long overdue. With the passage in Senate Finance, this critical bill is one step closer to streamlining the process for cases of abuse and neglect reported by medical personnel and other specialized mandated reporters. It gets cases in the hands of those CPS workers who can begin a thorough investigation immediately, rather than waiting for a determination to be made by hotline staff,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “The establishment of standards and procedures for coordination between hospitals, law enforcement, and local departments will ensure that the individuals charged with keeping our children safe have the tools, information and resources they need directly at their fingertips.”

“Strong partnership and alignment between the medical community and CPS is essential to protecting our children,” said **Dr. Stephen Turkovich, Chief Medical Officer at Women and Children’s Hospital of Buffalo**. “When barriers are eliminated and direct communication is established the medical and CPS teams can best coordinate care. Our children and families deserve a streamlined, efficient and coordinated process.”

This legislation was introduced in response to the 1998 murder of a 3-year-old boy from Sullivan County, Christopher Gardner. According to reports, two phone calls

made to the state's child abuse hotline reporting abuse to Christopher were never investigated, including one from a mandated reporter. After his death, prosecutors said there wasn't an inch on the boy's body that didn't have a bruise or a burn. His mother and her friend were ultimately sentenced to life behind bars for their role in his death.

Stronger coordination between these professionals charged with the protection of our children will allow physicians, nurses and law enforcement to better fulfill their obligations to protect the safety and well-being of children under their care. In Erie County, steps have already been taken to improve the coordination between hospital staff and the local CPS department by the placement of CPS caseworkers at some of the county's busiest hospitals. This legislation builds and expands on that effort statewide by establishing standards and procedures for hospital discharge, and cross-communication between hospital staff, law enforcement and CPS caseworkers. Some of the reforms included in this bill would:

- Establish standardized documentation and procedures CPS workers may utilize to direct hospital staff to keep an at-risk child in protective custody.
- Establish procedures for hospitals to identify CPS personnel present and for conducting an investigation within the hospital.
- Create coordinated discharge plans with CPS and the hospital for at-risk children, along with developing a plan for continuing medical care where applicable.
- Establish systems of access of communication between hospital staff, law enforcement and CPS workers to provide for ongoing protection and supervision of at-risk children within the county.

This legislation is part of Kennedy's continued push for comprehensive reforms within New York's Child Protective Services system. Last fall, Governor Cuomo signed into law legislation sponsored by Kennedy, which improves the statewide child abuse hotline by requiring New York State to track repeated reports of abuse and neglect. S1902 further speeds up the process for reporting abuse through the hotline, and opens the door for immediate investigations. Now having passed through the Senate Finance Committee, Kennedy urges swift consideration of the legislation on the Senate floor.

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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>.*