



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## As Final Week of Session Nears, Senators Kennedy, Panepinto Join Local Leaders to Demand Action on Microbead Legislation

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY June 15, 2015

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENT, GOING GREEN, POLLUTION**



*With Hundreds of Thousands of Plastics Particles Found in Great Lakes, Concern Over NY Water Quality is at All-Time High*

*Nearly Two Months After Assembly Passage, WNY Leaders Say There's No Excuse for Lack of Senate Action on Microbead Bill This Year*

BUFFALO, NY – Senators Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) and Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo) joined city and county leaders, along with community action organizations, to demand that the

Senate take immediate action on legislation designed to keep our New York's waterways clean. Under the "Microbeads-Free Waters Act," (S.3932), businesses would be prohibited from selling soaps, toothpaste, shampoos and other personal products containing microbeads. Though often as small as a grain of sand, these plastic beads are become a large-scale problem targeting New York's lakes and rivers.

According to a report released by Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, microbeads have been found in treatment plant discharge throughout Western New York, including in Lackwanna and Grand Island. Additionally, a study by Sherri Mason from Fredonia College found microbead concentrations in the Great Lakes ranging from 1,500 to 1.1 million microbeads per square mile, with some of the highest concentrations located in Lake Erie.

With some cosmetic and care products containing as many as 350,000 microbeads per package, these particles frequently end up in sinks, bathtubs and showers in homes across the state. Unfortunately, as they wash away through waste systems, many treatment plants can't filter these beads out because of their miniscule size and a lack of expensive equipment needed to do so. As a result, these plastic beads pass into our waterways, and as of late, have been found in high concentration in New York's Great Lakes, Finger Lakes and rivers.

Environmental studies show these small beads often attract other pollutants, and can be toxic to fish and other basic aquatic organisms. While some corporations have already voluntarily made a commitment to phase these harmful beads out of their products, no law currently requires them to do so. Through this legislation, all manufacturers would no longer be able to sell personal cosmetic products containing microbeads.

"Buffalo and Western New York are communities that have been built around our most precious natural resource: our waterfront. In our city's industrial past, plants that were built around our lakes and rivers deeply polluted and nearly ruined this incredible asset. As we

work to correct the misdeeds of our past, we must continue to fight new pollutants, like microbeads, which threaten our environment and the new investment we are seeing along our waterfront," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "At its core, this is a matter of public health and safety. We're fighting to protect our water, protect our wildlife and ultimately protect the families in New York State. I thank our local activists for working day in and day out to protect our environment on a local level, and I urge my Senate colleagues to do their part in Albany."

"Microbeads enter New York's waterways through Lake Erie and wreak havoc on the environment all the way to Long Island," said **Senator Marc Panepinto**. "Along with them they carry additional pollutants that enter our ecosystem and make their way into the aquatic food chain. Western New York's greatest asset is its waterfront of which I am proud to represent 42 miles. Over the past decade, millions have been spent working to revitalize it. But the devastating effects of microbeads will continue to undermine those efforts until they are removed from cosmetic products once and for all. This critical issue should end here with us. The solution to protecting our natural resources lies with the Microbead-free Waters Act, which I have co-sponsored. It is imperative that we act quickly. I call on my Republican colleagues to see that this significant legislation is passed before the end of session."

"Microbead pollutants are a major threat to our eco-system and our waterways. I encourage the Senate Majority to take immediate action and stop the estimated 19 tons of micro-beads that are dumped into our waterways every year," said **Erie County legislator Patrick Burke**. "I want to thank Senators Kennedy and Panepinto for their leadership on this issue, but if the Senate Majority won't act then Erie County will take measures to prevent these plastics from polluting Lake Erie and the surrounding waterways."

"The Alliance for the Great Lakes urges the New York State Senate to pass the Microbead Free Waters Act of 2015 and to become a nationwide leader on the issue of plastic pollution,"

said **Nate Drag of Alliance for the Great Lakes**. “This bill would provide a new model for protecting the Great Lakes and other waterbodies from plastic microbeads currently used in personal care products here in Western New York and across the country. With the support of Senator Kennedy and Senator Panepinto, we are hopeful the rest of the Senate will pass this common sense legislation before the end of the legislative session.”

**Saima Anjam, environmental health director at Environmental Advocates of New York** said, “Plastic beads don’t make anyone cleaner or more beautiful, so get them out of our shampoo and toothpaste. The longer the state ignores the impact that plastic microbeads have on our waterways and wildlife, the more it will cost taxpayers to fix. The Microbead-Free Waters Act has majority, bipartisan Senate support. Environmental Advocates applauds Senators Kennedy and Panepinto for their leadership on this issue, and calls on Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan to immediately allow a fair vote.”

“Micro beads are having a huge impact on our waterways amounting to as much as 90% of the new plastic waste in the Great Lakes,” said **Sierra Club Niagara Chapter Chair Lynda Schneekloth**. “Unlike other forms of trash on our beaches, there is no way to clean up these tiny plastic particles once they are introduced into the environment. Besides, we don’t need microbeads in cosmetics, there are alternatives. And perhaps more important, we should not be leaving any more toxicity for the next generation to endure. Let’s ban microbeads in New York.”

“If allowed a vote, the Microbead-Free Waters Act is guaranteed to pass. Albany dysfunction must not stand in the way of protecting our Great Lakes,” said **Brian Smith, associate executive director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment**. “CCE commends Senators Panepinto and Kennedy for their leadership to help get this critical legislation through the Senate.”

If passed by the Senate and signed into law by the Governor, this legislation would establish penalties for those who violate the Act. Offenders could face fines of up to \$2,500 for each day the Act is violated, and repeat offenders could face up to \$5,000 per day of violation.

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