



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Marc Panepinto

Invest In Our Infrastructure: Senator Panepinto Calls On UB To Relocate Law School To Vacant Dillon Courthouse

MARC PANEPINTO | October 2, 2015

| ISSUE: **HIGHER EDUCATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE**



Buffalo, N.Y. - After sitting vacant nearly four years, today, **Senator Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo)** called on the University at Buffalo to relocate its Law School to the former Michael J. Dillon U.S. Courthouse. Last week, the U.S. General Services Administration announced it was disposing of the 183,000 square foot facility no longer used by the federal government. The seven-story former courthouse occupies an entire block in the heart of the downtown corridor situated within walking distance of local, state and federal court systems. Recently

upgraded, the building would provide students with the dedicated internal and external infrastructure necessary for a successful urban law school.

Roughly a 30-minute drive from the downtown corridor, SUNY Buffalo Law School currently resides in O'Brian Hall on the University at Buffalo's North Campus in Amherst. The 205,000 square foot facility is also home to the Graduate School of Education, a cafeteria and miscellaneous office space. Once ranked 15th in the nation, SUNY Buffalo Law School is currently ranked 87th according to the U.S. News and World Report.

A SUNY Buffalo Law School graduate, Senator Panepinto noted the move would benefit the SUNY system's only law school by building off momentum created by the university's presence on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.

"The relocation of SUNY's only law school would provide students the opportunity to live, work and learn where the action takes place," **said Senator Marc Panepinto**. This common-sense alternative would not only create a centralized and synergistic educational experience for students and potential employers, but allow UB to increase its ranking through marketing to potential students while freeing up additional space for growth on the North Campus. The success of a dedicated Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus is proof enough. It's time we invest in infrastructure that's already been developed and offer our law students the same opportunity. I am calling on the University of Buffalo to begin to analyze moving the law school into the vacant Dillon Courthouse."

Currently eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and subsequent tax incentives, the General Services Administration has long sought out creative ideas for the future use of the Dillon Courthouse. Accompanied by the addition of a new roof, elevators and generator the facility is primed for the University's long-awaited move into the City of Buffalo. Unused resources at nearby Statler City could also be tapped, if additional space is needed.

"Returning the SUNY law school to downtown Buffalo would have a tremendous impact both on the students and the economy," **said Joel Feroletto, Delaware District Council Member.** The city, state, and federal courthouses are all within walking distance to the potential new law school location. Most of the regions law firms would be within walking distance. This would give law students a great opportunity to access courts and interact with attorneys while making downtown more vibrant. With the recent improvements on Main Street including the announcement of EXPO food hall in the Market Arcade building, the growing medical campus, and Canalside, the law school would be a great asset to the revitalization of downtown and provide outstanding opportunities for future attorneys."

As part of SUNY UB Law's program, students are required to complete externship, clerkship or 50-hour pro bono services hours for entrance to the New York State Bar. According to University requirements, these legal externships take place at pre-approved not-for-profit and government offices. Clerkships are offered at pre-approved federal, state and county judges over the course of a semester.

Pre-approved externship sites include: the City of Buffalo Law Department, Buffalo City School District, the Erie County District Attorney's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

"In 2008, we surveyed our classmates and found 73% of SUNY Buffalo Law Students were in favor of moving the law school downtown," **explained Rebecca Hoffman, an attorney with the Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo.** "As dual degree candidate, I was taking law classes on North Campus, urban planning classes on South Campus, and coming downtown for my internship at city hall, and not necessarily in that order. It was extremely inconvenient. The center of legal gravity is downtown and that is where the law school needs to be."

The proposed site also sits along major public transit routes and in close proximity to area not-for-profits and that provide free legal services to the community. Legal services

organizations such as the Western New York Law Center and the Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, both located on Main Street, employ the expertise of SUNY UB Law students to represent low-income residents in civil matters.

“The entire nonprofit legal services community is located in downtown Buffalo, and the nonprofits provide many opportunities for law students to get involved in helping others,” **said Joe Kelemen, Western New York Law Center Executive Director.** “In addition, the courts and major law firms are downtown. Moving the law school into the legal community will benefit students, the courts, law firms, and the residents of Buffalo and Erie County.”

#