



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Kennedy Warns State Budget Proposal Would Cut Over \$110 Thousand from Buffalo Zoo, Botanical Gardens, Tifft Nature Preserve, Place Programming in Jeopardy

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY February 21, 2018

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND**

*In Letter to Governor Cuomo & Legislative Leaders, Kennedy Calls for Restoration of \$2.5 Million cut from Zoos, Botanical Gardens, & Aquariums Program Funding*

*Kennedy Stands with Leaders from Buffalo Zoo, Botanical Gardens, Tifft Nature Preserve to Defend Critical State Funding Source*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) stood with leaders from the Buffalo Zoo, Erie County Botanical Gardens, and the Buffalo Museum of Science to push back against proposed cuts to the state's Zoos, Botanical Gardens, and Aquariums (ZBGA) program that would cut tens of thousands in state support to these three critical cultural institutions. The current round, 2016-21, was expected to be fully funded at \$15 million in the state budget, but this year's proposed budget calls for a \$2.5 million cut, funding the program at only \$12.5 million. The ZBGA grant program, administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, is a competitive grant program for eligible organizations to develop educational, cultural and recreational programming, as well as to support permanent collections. If funding is not restored, the Buffalo Zoo stands to lose roughly \$60,000, the Museum of Science's Tifft Nature Preserve roughly \$37,000, and the Botanical Gardens \$14,000.

“These may seem like small amounts, but these organizations rely on this funding, and every dollar counts,” said Senator Kennedy. “For example, if Tifft loses this funding, it can result in less education programming for kids, and less resources to fight against invasive species. When it comes to cultural institutions, Buffalo punches above its weight – but that requires reinvestment in these amazing organizations. Our final budget needs to restore this funding that was promised by the state two years ago.”

“Tifft Nature Preserve relies on ZBGA funding to forward its mission,” said Buffalo Museum of Science President & CEO Marisa Wigglesworth. “For decades, children and adults in Western New York have learned about conservation and the environment from trips to Tifft. This potential funding cut puts important programming at risk, and would lead to fewer educational initiatives and reduced impact. We thank Senator Kennedy for his efforts to reverse these proposed cuts, and we look forward to offering a wealth of educational programming for years to come.”

“The Buffalo Zoo welcomes more than 530,000 guests every year from the Western New York region and beyond,” said Buffalo Zoo President & CEO Norah Fletchall. “ZBGA funding supports programs and operations and the Zoo such as animal care as well as education programming for children of all ages. Our mission is to connect our community to wildlife and wild places. Reductions in funding will impact our ability to continue that effort and to provide a robust cultural resource for the citizens of our region.”

“ZBGA funding is extremely important to the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens,” said Botanical Gardens President & CEO David Swarts. “If the funding cuts are adopted, our important educational programs and extensive horticulture collection will suffer.”

Current funding under the ZBGA program is based on grants that will run between April 1, 2016 and March 31, 2021. Unless and until this proposed funding cut is reversed, it is expected

that funding to each grant recipient would be cut proportionally to the overall funding cut. For the 2018-19 budget, that would result in a 17% cut to the already-awarded grant levels. The impacted organizations impact hundreds of thousands of Western New Yorkers every year, and provide millions of dollars in economic stimulus to the region.

The text of Senator Kennedy's letter is below:

February 20, 2018

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

Governor of New York State

Executive Chamber

New York State Capitol

Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

As negotiations for the 2018-19 state budget continue, I write with concern over the proposed \$2.5 million cut to the Zoos, Botanical Gardens, and Aquariums (ZBGA) program. This 17% cut would imperil the budgets of organizations that rely on this funding. I urge you and the leaders of the Legislature to fully fund the ZBGA program at \$15 million.

The ZBGA program goes back decades, with the current iteration funding five-year grants from 2016-2021. Organizations in Buffalo such as the Buffalo Zoo, the Museum of Science's Tifft Nature Preserve, and the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens have planned their budgets with the expectation that these 5 year grants would continue at their current levels through 2021. A 17% cut would translate to roughly \$60,000 for the Buffalo Zoo, \$37,000 for Tifft Nature Preserve, and \$14,000 for the Botanical Gardens each year. These potential funding cuts would force them to either finance this gap through new donations, or to cut services. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come to these sites each year, pumping millions of dollars into the local economy. We can ill-afford to put their fiscal health at risk.

All three of these institutions offer important and comprehensive educational programming to local children. At Tifft, for example, kids are taken through a 264 acre refuge that was created more than 45 years ago from a landfill, where they see first hand, the damage that can be caused by pollution, as well as the changes that we can make to create a better future. Whether they are learning about our environment, horticulture, conservation, and the risks posed by climate change, these three organizations serve a critical role in our local educational and cultural systems.

I understand that this year's budget calls for difficult choices to be made, but I firmly believe it cannot come at the expense of education for our children. I urge you to reverse this proposed cut, and to protect Buffalo's world-class cultural and environmental institutions. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Should you have any questions, as always, I welcome your call.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District

Cc: Honorable John Flanagan, Temporary President, New York State Senate

Honorable Carl Heastie, Speaker of the New York State Assembly

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senate Democratic Conference Leader

Honorable Jeffrey Klein, Independent Democratic Conference Leader

Honorable Brian Kolb, Minority Leader of the New York State Assembly

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