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February 19, 2013

Chancellor Nancy Zimpher  
State University of New York  
SUNY System Administration  
State University Plaza  
353 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12246

Dear Chancellor Zimpher:

I write to you today in response to an incident that put many local students' lives at risk. As you know, there was a carbon monoxide buildup inside a campus dormitory building at the University at Buffalo this past weekend. It sickened several students and led to the full evacuation of the building. Tragedy was averted at UB because campus officials responded quickly to the CO leak, but we cannot let something like this happen again.

I know you and the entire SUNY administration place a high priority on student safety. When incidents like this happen, I believe SUNY must re-examine its policies and take steps to improve the safety of all students on its campuses.

To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, SUNY should ensure there is an operable CO detector in every dorm room, and the detectors should be inspected more frequently to ensure they are in good condition and working properly.

Carbon monoxide is a leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths. In 2010, Amanda's Law – which ensures CO detectors are present and operable in homes across the state – went into effect to prevent carbon monoxide poisonings in New York State. More-frequently-inspected CO detectors in every dorm room will more closely reflect the safety recommendations of first-responders and fire prevention groups like the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

During the 2012-13 academic year, the typical yearly expense for room and board for a SUNY undergraduate student is \$11,060. For the room fees they pay, students and their families should be able to expect that their safety is protected and diligent efforts will be made to prevent CO poisoning. A stronger SUNY policy on CO detectors will help students and parents breathe a little easier.



Officials who oversee campus dormitories at each SUNY college or university should ensure a CO detector is present and functional during their regularly scheduled inspections. SUNY should instruct residence hall staff to test CO detectors monthly, as recommended by NFPA.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to continuing to work with you to protect student safety and enhance educational opportunities in New York State. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact my office at 716-826-2683.

Sincerely,

  
Timothy M. Kennedy  
New York State Senator, 63rd District