

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



**TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY**  
**SENATOR, 58TH DISTRICT**

**RANKING MINORITY MEMBER**  
COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND SMALL BUSINESS

AGRICULTURE

**COMMITTEES**

CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME AND CORRECTION

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM, PARKS  
AND RECREATION

ENERGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

HIGHER EDUCATION

INSURANCE

TRANSPORTATION

□ **ALBANY OFFICE:**  
ROOM 506  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247  
(518) 455-2426 OFFICE  
(518) 426-6851 FAX

□ **DISTRICT OFFICE:**  
2239 SOUTH PARK AVENUE  
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14220  
(716) 826-2683 OFFICE  
(716) 826-2793 FAX

**E-MAIL ADDRESS:**  
KENNEDY@NYSenate.GOV

May 24, 2012

Dr. Dianne Vertes  
Chief Medical Examiner  
501 Kensington Ave.  
Buffalo, NY 14214

Dear Dr. Vertes:

I am writing today in regards to the disease myocarditis, and to tell you about a statewide effort to spread awareness of this illness. Myocarditis, as you may know, is an unpredictable disease characterized by an inflammation of the heart muscle that can lead to sudden death. It is an illness that is often difficult to detect and can lead to an undetermined cause of death. This leaves families who have lost a loved one to question, in their time of grief, what happened and what they could have done to prevent this devastating loss.

The disease of myocarditis becomes even more insidious upon examination of its prevalence in otherwise young, active, healthy children across our state. Not only can pediatric myocarditis rob families' of their young children's lives in an instant – it also may not be detected as an obvious symptom or cause of death during an autopsy. This happened to Amy and Joe Skowronski, of West Seneca, NY, who lost their 10-year-old son, Luke Gould, suddenly on November 16, 2011. Luke's story, and his parent's tireless advocacy to determine the truth are the genesis of this statewide effort to spread awareness of myocarditis.

Luke Gould was an energetic and athletic 10 year old boy when he passed away in his sleep. Luke played three sports a year, loved being the goaltender for the West Seneca Wings hockey team, and was a source of joy for his friends, teammates, parents, and older sister. After Amy, Luke's mother, made that agonizing discovery, an autopsy was performed to determine what happened to this healthy child. The initial results were inconclusive, and the family was notified that the local medical examiner was likely to declare an unknown cause of death.

Unwilling to accept this outcome and seeking understanding and closure, Luke's family reached out to my office to ask for help in keeping this case open. We immediately called the Erie County Medical Examiner's office, and they were more than willing to work with us and Luke's family. They took another look, and upon further scrutiny, the cause was determined to be myocarditis.

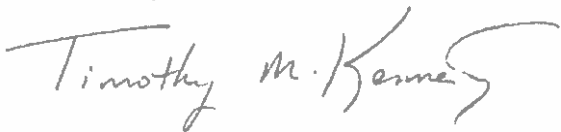
Not knowing the cause of death of one's child is a pain that no person should endure, which is why I have partnered with Amy and Joe Skowronski to spread awareness of myocarditis. As a cause of death of otherwise healthy individuals, especially children, myocarditis can be difficult to detect. The origin of myocarditis can be due to a variety of factors, including viral infection and exposure to toxins, and therefore this uncertainty surrounding the disease, coupled with a lack of widespread recognition, may hamper the ability to consider it as a cause of death.

As a Medical Examiner, you have an intimate knowledge of the autopsy process and the national best practices followed throughout each procedure. However, given the story of Luke Gould, I would encourage you to remain aware of myocarditis in future cases of unexplained death in otherwise healthy young people. If there is a case where the cause of death is undetermined, we are asking that you consider myocarditis as a cause and examine the tissue evidence closely.

Additionally, I have enclosed a copy of a resolution which I sponsored that was recently passed by the New York State Senate and Assembly on May 22, 2012. This resolution highlights Luke's story, and calls upon Governor Cuomo to memorialize November 16, 2012 as Myocarditis Awareness Day. Please share this resolution with your coworkers in order to spread recognition and awareness of myocarditis.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration in this matter. Please feel free to contact me at my office if you have questions or would like to help us in spreading awareness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy M. Kennedy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Timothy M. Kennedy  
New York State Senator, 58<sup>th</sup> District