



News from the Office of **ADAM J. BELLO** **MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE ADAM BELLO ANNOUNCES THE CREATION OF MONROE COUNTY ADVISORY TASK FORCE ON BROADBAND

Rochester, NY – Monroe County Executive Adam Bello is pleased to announce the creation of the Monroe County Advisory Task Force on Broadband. The Task Force will include government partners and community leaders who will be charged with assessing internet services in low income and rural areas of Monroe County, with a goal of finding concrete solutions that will close service gaps and eliminate barriers to access.

“Throughout my first year in office, I’ve heard from residents from all corners of our county about the need to improve access to reliable internet service, something that many of us take for granted,” said Bello. “Learning from home and working from home throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have certainly shined a light on this growing problem, but I’m hopeful that this Task Force will help develop plans and opportunities to address this inequity in our community.”

Census data shows that nearly one-fifth of city households and one-third of rural households do not have an internet subscription, while many more opt to depend solely on their smartphone plan. County Executive Bello believes Monroe County must be a leader in addressing the disparities in access to internet by exploring opportunities to offer free or low cost high-speed broadband to those who do not have it.

The digital divide in Monroe County is not a new or unique issue, but these inequities have been exacerbated since the arrival of COVID-19 in March 2020. Access to computers, tablets, and smartphones as well as high speed internet was again shown to be something low-income and rural communities were often without. As many in Monroe County continue to struggle to work and learn from home, it is critically important that these needs are identified and met.

While bridging the digital divide will help to alleviate issues for many of those less fortunate in our community, County Executive Bello is optimistic that the county as a whole will see benefits. The County Executive views broadband access as an economic driver that will attract new business to the region, and will be an asset to entrepreneurs and established business alike as they evaluate their options.

"Everyone needs access to affordable and fast internet in order to fully participate in economic, educational and civic opportunities. The County Executive has assembled a bipartisan and

representative group of leaders. We will work hard to produce results for this community. We have no choice but to act with urgency,” added County Legislator Rachel Barnhart, a member of the Broadband Task Force.

“Access to the internet has long been an equity issue, but the pandemic catapulted it to a crisis level,” says Simeon Banister, vice president of community programs at Rochester Area Community Foundation and Task Force member. “The Community Foundation has already partnered with Monroe County and other philanthropic partners to provide MiFi’s to Rochester City School District students as an immediate and temporary solution for the digital divide. We look forward to working together on this task force to develop long-term and sustainable solutions to ensure that everyone in our community can participate in life and learning online.”

County Executive Bello has appointed Ana Liss, the Director of the Monroe County Department of Planning and Development, to lead the Monroe County Advisory Task Force on Broadband. The Task Force will provide the County Executive and his administration with immediate feedback to assist in the County’s possible development of a Community Access Plan for High-Speed Internet. This plan will aim to provide information that will be crucial for both the administration and task force as they navigate closing our community’s digital divide.

“To effectively learn and work from home, every Monroe County family needs reliable, affordable access to high-speed internet connectivity. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fact that so many of our neighborhoods have been left in the dark, either because they don’t have access to good service or because options are too pricey,” added Liss. “To reflect Monroe County’s legacy as an innovation hub, a great place to raise a family, and a leader in workforce development, we must find solutions to bridging the ‘Digital Divide.’ County Executive Bello is taking a major step forward in achieving that goal with this Task Force, and I am honored to be part of it.”

The Community Access Plan for High-Speed Internet will identify barriers to service, examine public and private sector roles in providing high-speed internet services, seek partnerships and ensure that any County plans to expand access align with New York State and nonprofit community broadband goals.

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