



News from the Office of
Adam J. Bello
Monroe County Executive



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Monroe County to Assist Afghan Interpreters and Their Families

Monroe County Executive Adam Bello today directed the Monroe County Veterans Service Agency (VSA) to offer certain veterans benefits to Afghan interpreters and their families who we are welcoming to our area.

The VSA is offering mental health resources to interpreters, which include access to The Dwyer Program, a peer-to-peer support organization that helps veterans transition back to civilian life, and Trybe Ecotherapy, a program which uses a nature-based approach to mental health with the goal of reducing the impacts of stress.

*“These interpreters risked their lives, and the well-being their families, to help our military with its missions overseas,” said **County Executive Adam Bello**. “Now, it’s our turn to help them by providing them with support and services to make their arrival and life here happy and safe. We welcome them to Monroe County.”*

The VSA will also connect interpreters to employment services, and legal assistance with the help of the DeMarco Taylor Law Group, which will offer basic legal counseling pro bono for interpreters and their families.

Since mid-August, the United States military evacuated nearly 120,000 people from Afghanistan, many of whom are Afghan allies of the US, and served as interpreters for members of the armed forces. More than 50 of these refugees have already come to Monroe County so far this year, with as many as 200 more expected by the end of 2021.

*“For two decades, our Afghan allies courageously stood shoulder to shoulder with the brave men and women of our Armed Forces. Their service and sacrifice undoubtedly saved lives and ensured the success of countless military and diplomatic operations – and for that I and profoundly grateful,” said **Congressman Joe Morelle**. “Now as our allies begin to arrive in America it is our turn to stand with them and ensure they receive the support and services needed to build a new life in a new home. I am grateful to County Executive Bello and so many other partners in our community for their commitment to welcoming and supporting these families into Monroe County.”*

Monroe County's community partners are continuing their support of the interpreters and their families. The Catholic Family Center (CFC) is offering temporary housing, and will connect refugees to public assistance programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), health coverage, and other temporary aids. CFC also offers employment preparation placement services, and will help enroll children in local school districts.

*“Rochester has a history of welcoming refugees, and a support infrastructure ready to engage in welcoming these new arrivals who will become our neighbors. There has been an outpouring of support from across Monroe County, with donations, parishes offering cultural support, landlords offering housing support, and those wishing to simply understand how best to welcome their new neighbors,” said **Marlene Bessette, President and CEO of Catholic Family Center.** “We are honored to be able to step forward and help welcome these vulnerable families.”*

The Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) is offering peer support, mental health services, and services related to its behavioral health program assistance. They will also provide access to a barber shop, hydro massage, massage therapy, art therapy, and more.

*“VOC is prepared and honored to do our part in supporting the Special Immigrant Visa families coming to Rochester from Afghanistan. These men and women put their lives on the line for American service members,” said **VOC executive director Laura Stradley.** “We owe them a debt of gratitude for their selflessness, and during these turbulent times in their home country, VOC wants to be part of the community that welcomes them to their new home in the United States.”*