



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF  
**ADAM J. BELLO**  
MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**For Immediate Release**

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## **MONROE COUNTY CELEBRATES DEAF AWARENESS MONTH WITH GRAND OPENING OF NEW HEADQUARTERS FOR DEAF REFUGEE ADVOCACY**

*Deaf Refugee Advocacy to centralize services with \$2 million American Rescue  
Plan Act funds allocated by Monroe County*

**ROCHESTER, NY** — Monroe County Commissioner of Human Services Thalia Wright today joined County Legislators to celebrate Deaf Awareness Month and mark the grand opening of the Deaf Refugee Advocacy's (DRA) new location inside the Sibley building in downtown Rochester. The new office space will be used to provide workshops and training in American Sign Language, life skills, job readiness training and social events to Deaf individuals who are new to our country.

September is National Deaf Awareness Month, a month dedicated to celebrating the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and increasing awareness of Deaf issues, individuals and culture. The Greater Rochester region is home to one of the nation's largest per-capita populations of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

In recognition of this large and often underserved population, Monroe County allocated \$2 million of its share of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the DRA. The ARPA funds were secured by Congressman Morelle and U.S. Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand.

"Deaf Refugee Advocacy provides life changing support and training to this underserved Deaf population. It is essential to have their important services in a centralized location to better serve clients and their community," **said Commissioner Wright**. "Thanks to Congressman Morelle and Senators Gillibrand and Schumer for securing these critical funds and the Monroe County legislature for approving this funding."

"Congratulations to Deaf Refugee Advocacy on the opening of their new office, allowing them to continue their excellent work helping newcomers assimilate into our local and thriving Deaf community," **said Congressman Joe Morelle**. "I'm grateful to Monroe County for ensuring everyone in our community is empowered to reach their full potential. Our area is truly blessed to have extensive resources available for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing like Deaf Refugee Advocacy, and I'm extremely proud to have delivered this funding."

“Having a nationally-renowned institution like NTID has meant that Monroe County has long been a haven for the Deaf community,” **said US Senator Charles Schumer.** “Deaf Refugee Advocacy is a crucial part of this local network, and I’m proud that the funds I delivered in the American Rescue Plan will go towards providing them with a new office where they can continue to provide much-needed programs such as financial literacy classes, workforce development training, and ASL workshops. I commend Monroe County for supporting the needs of deaf refugees and ensuring that the county continues to be the ideal place to live and work for the entire deaf community.”

“We have a responsibility to ensure that we provide all Monroe County residents an equitable opportunity to succeed; and it’s our duty as public servants to provide access to all the services this county has to offer. Deaf Refugee Advocacy clients are provided with direct services and advocacy focused on Deaf refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants, and their unique needs. This funding will help them carry out their mission and have greater impact and reach,” **said Minority Leader Yversha Roman.**

According to Deaf Refugee Advocacy, there are an estimated 3,400 Deaf Refugees, Immigrants, and Asylum-seekers (RIAs) in Monroe County. DRA also says an estimated 75% of RIAs never had opportunities to learn their home country’s spoken or sign language, or English or ASL, resulting in severe language deprivation. RIAs also face systemic barriers such as navigating through the citizenship process.

“Deaf Refugee Advocacy was founded in 2017 with an all-volunteer team. For the last six years, prior to obtaining this funding, we received support from all sectors of the Rochester community – Deaf community, organizations, businesses, and donors. Our operation was small, and our hearts were big,” **said Deaf Refugee Advocacy Executive Director Diana Pryntz.** “We are deeply thankful for the faith and trust of our County Executive and federal and county delegation in Deaf Refugee Advocacy. As a result of their approval of this funding, we transitioned into a full-time operations organization empowering us to serve this population reliably and consistently.”

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