



City of Rochester • County of Monroe

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2025

County Executive Adam Bello and Mayor Malik Evans Announces Creation of Deaf Equity Council

Community members are encouraged to join the Deaf Equity Council by emailing DeafEquity@monroecounty.gov or calling our Video Phone Number at (585) 206-1090

Rochester, NY – Monroe County Executive Adam Bello and Mayor Malik Evans joined Monroe County Chief Diversity Officer David Scott and community leaders today to announce the formation of Monroe County’s Deaf Equity Council (DEC). The newly formed DEC will advise, advocate, and drive systemic change to enhance the quality of life for all Deaf, Deafblind, and Heard of Hearing Individuals in Monroe County.

“As public servants, we must ensure every Monroe County resident, regardless of ability, has their needs met. The newly formed DEC will help us shape policies and initiatives through an equitable lens to better serve our community,” **said County Executive Bello**. “I thank DEI Commissioner David Scott and our DEC members for establishing this vital council, which will drive positive change for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. I encourage residents to join and help build a truly inclusive Monroe County where everyone can thrive.”

“Our community has the highest per capita number of deaf and hard of hearing people in the country, so it’s important that their needs and concerns are woven into our policies and practices,” **said Mayor Malik D. Evans**. “It is my hope that this council will educate and inform our work and ensure that our Deaf and hard of hearing friends and neighbors can fully participate in all that our community has to offer.”

"Everyone has a fundamental right to Language access," **said Legislature President Yversha Román**. "Ensuring equitable communication is not only vital for our Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing neighbors—it strengthens our entire community. When everyone has access to services, information, and opportunities, we create a more inclusive, connected Monroe County. The formation of the Deaf Equity Council is a crucial step toward breaking down barriers so that all residents, regardless of language, can fully participate in our community, helping us all address concerns affecting the quality of life. I appreciate my partners in government and the Deaf Equity Council for their commitment to uplifting Deaf voices."

“In order for the Monroe County government to be inclusive, we must be accessible. This new Deaf Equity Council is a step in the right direction and will ensure all residents can communicate with us so we can understand and address as many of their needs as possible,” **said Director of Monroe County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion David Scott.** “My thanks to County Executive Adam Bello and Mayor Malik Evans for their partnership and support of this new council as well as the dedicated Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing activists who are working with us to build a more inclusive county.”

The DEC is dedicated to ensuring that Deaf residents and visitors thrive in all aspects of life. As a champion of, by, and for Deaf individuals, the Council focuses on addressing key issues including language equity, accessibility, and intersectional identities. The DEC’s mission includes:

- Conducting community outreach and assessments to identify priorities and needs;
- Advising city, town, and county officials on policies impacting Deaf residents;
- Ensuring legislative drafting and implementation considers the needs of the Deaf community;
- Strengthening connections with the City of Rochester and neighboring towns;
- Upholding the right to sign language, such as American Sign Language, as a fundamental human right;
- Reducing disparities in language access and quality of life in public and private services;
- Celebrating the contributions and lived experiences of Deaf individuals;
- Providing insight and resources on accessibility, inclusion, and cultural needs.

The DEC consists of members who bring diverse knowledge, lived experiences, and professional expertise. Membership is open to individuals residing or working in Monroe County, as well as those with a vested interest in the well-being of Deaf residents. The Council will meet approximately bi-monthly with sub-committees for specific tasks and voting members will have lived experience as Deaf individuals.

“When Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals thrive, our entire community thrives. The DEC is about building a stronger, more inclusive Monroe County where equitable policies, better communication, and deeper understanding benefit everyone. Rochester has long been known for the size of its Deaf community; today, we take a step toward being known for our shared success,” **said Davin Searls, DEC representative.**

Joining the DEC offers individuals the opportunity to create lasting systemic change, advise representatives on policy decisions, and serve as a vital bridge between Deaf residents and City/County leadership.

An information session will be held at the Henrietta Library on April 16 from 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

For more information or to join the Deaf Equity Council, interested participants can call our Video Phone Number at 585-206-1090, send an email to DeafEquity@monroecounty.gov or visit monroecounty.gov/dei-deafequitycouncil.



###

Media inquiries:

Steve Barz

Monroe County, Director, Communications
SteveBarz@monroecounty.gov
(585) 753-1064 – office

Barbara Pierce

City of Rochester Director, Bureau of Communications
Barbara.Pierce@cityofrochester.gov
(585) 557-1160 - office