



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Sean M. Ryan

Senator Sean Ryan, Assemblymember Jon Rivera, Councilmember David Rivera Join Local Resettlement Agencies To Provide Update On Plans For Refugees

SEAN M. RYAN August 20, 2021

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PROVIDE UPDATE ON PLANS FOR REFUGEES

Census Numbers Show Growth In Buffalo Population For First Time In 70 Years, Driven By Influx Of Refugees And Immigrants – State Financial Support Has Made New York And Buffalo Top Destinations For Refugee Resettlement

Elected Officials Tout Buffalo's Preparedness For Expected Influx Of Refugees From Afghanistan

BUFFALO – Today, August 20, 2021, New York State Senator Sean Ryan, Assemblymember Jon Rivera, and Buffalo Common Councilmember David Rivera gathered at Jericho Road Community Health Center to provide an update on refugee resettlement progress and plans for the months ahead. They were joined by representatives from Catholic Charities of Buffalo, The International Institute of Buffalo, Jewish Family Services of Western New York, and Journey's End Refugee Services.

Recent census data revealed that Buffalo's population has grown for the first time since the 1950 census, with refugees and immigrants contributing in large part to that growth. Buffalo's population has grown to 278,349 people – an increase of more than 17,000, or 6.5%. Erie County has also seen growth in the last decade, increasing to 954,236 – an increase of more than 35,000, or 3.8%. The population growth among refugees and immigrants has helped to boost the regional economy and prepare Buffalo and Western New York for future growth as the nation continues to diversify.

Today, local officials stressed the importance of continued policies to welcome refugees and immigrants to the Buffalo community. More than 90% of refugees coming into New York settle in Upstate communities. Since 2002, more than 16,000 refugees have come to the City of Buffalo, with thousands more settling in places such as Utica, Syracuse, and Rochester. Refugees have helped to stem population losses in Upstate New York communities, and have contributed to economic growth by opening small businesses and employing local workers.

State support has also been essential to the refugee resettlement progress Buffalo has made. Senator Ryan worked to establish New York's Enhanced Services to Refugees Program in 2017, and this year fought to secure a record \$3 million for the program. Since 2017, the program has provided \$10 million to support the work done by New York's refugee resettlement agencies, helping provide essential services such as housing, job training, and childcare. An additional \$1.8 billion in recent federal funding is helping community health centers like Jericho Road support immigrants and refugees as they rebuild their lives in the United States. Jericho Road provides a wide range of support for underserved and marginalized communities in Buffalo, including the region's refugee and immigrant populations.

With an estimated 30,000 Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders currently requiring evacuation from Afghanistan, an influx of refugees is expected in the coming months. Buffalo is one of 19 cities available

to Special Immigrant Visa holders resettling in the United States, and many of these immigrants are likely to choose Buffalo due to the city's relatively low cost of living and robust Afghan community. Evacuees from Afghanistan will first arrive at U.S. military bases and will then be relocated to the 19 SIV cities. In addition to assisting individuals who arrive via the United Nations Refugee Program, resettlement agencies in New York also provide assistance to SIV holders. State funding has prepared Buffalo to welcome an influx of refugees from Afghanistan as well as Haiti, which is currently experiencing a humanitarian crisis due to an earthquake and political turmoil.

Officials also urged the public to donate grocery gift cards and toiletry items to Jericho Road and the local resettlement agencies to assist with the anticipated influx of newly arrived families from Afghanistan.

Senator Sean Ryan said, "With the many thousands of Afghans expected to seek refuge in the United States in the coming months, we must continue to support our local refugee resettlement agencies to ensure that our community is ready to welcome them with open arms. Our region has benefited greatly from its vibrant refugee and immigrant communities, and it's imperative that we maintain our role as a leading community for displaced people in New York State."

Assemblymember Jon D. Rivera said, "Whether it's foreign policy decisions that lead to humanitarian crises or the continuation of extracting non-renewable resources from the Earth, which in turn contributes to extreme weather events and subsequent migrations, Buffalo is well-positioned to accept refugees and integrate them into our community. The most recent census data shows how integral immigrants are to our city and how they have been the impetus for our first population growth in 70 years. With our proximity to a fresh water source and our excess capacity in infrastructure, Buffalo is perfectly placed to continue its renaissance well into the future."

Buffalo Common Councilmember David Rivera said, "The West Side of Buffalo has long been comprised of immigrants and refugees from all over the world, leading to the Niagara District's rich culture and diversity. We continue to look forward to welcoming any new immigrants or refugees to our community."

Buffalo Common Councilmember Mitch Nowakowski said, "The City of Buffalo has a long history of welcoming new Americans into our neighborhoods; it's in our DNA. And their impact is substantial, both culturally and economically. According to the New American Economy, immigrants contributed \$258.8 million in state and local taxes to the Buffalo metro area in 2019. This money is reinvested in schools, infrastructure, health systems, and other public services that continue to aid in their transition to our region – and from which we all benefit. It is in our city's best interest to prioritize investments which support refugees and displaced families, and help them become Buffalonians!"

Eva Hassett, Executive Director of the International Institute of Buffalo, said, "We are standing at a critical juncture in our community's history. While we look toward the future with hope and celebrate our city's growth, we grieve alongside those facing persecution around the world, especially in Afghanistan. We stand in solidarity with those here in Western New York who are hoping and praying for safe passage for their loved ones."

We must be clear-eyed about our moral obligation to expand our capacity to welcome refugees to the United States and to Buffalo and be ever mindful of the powerful positive impact that welcoming the foreign-born to Buffalo has on our communities, neighborhoods, and economies.

We are grateful for the tremendous leadership we have at the local and state level. Now more than ever, we must reaffirm our commitment to welcoming new refugees, supporting refugee and immigrant-owned businesses, and working to make Buffalo a welcoming and inclusive community for all. We have deep faith that this community will continue to show refugees and immigrants that Buffalo truly is the City of Good Neighbors.”

Dr. Anna Ireland Mongo, Chief Program Officer of Jericho Road Community Health Center, said, “At Jericho Road, we are proud to be part of a city on the rise. The results of the 2020 census demonstrate what we've known all along — that Buffalo's continued commitment to welcoming refugees and immigrants from around the world is not only the right thing to do, it is also good for the region as a whole. We are so pleased that refugee admissions to the City of Good Neighbors are increasing again and we are ready, along with our partners, to warmly embrace and support all new arrivals.”

Dr. Molly S. Carr, President and Chief Operating Officer of Jewish Family Services of Western New York, said, “We were thrilled when the admissions cap for refugees was increased a few months ago and eager to find out how many refugees we would welcome into the Buffalo community so that we could prepare. Despite some obvious uncertainties, what we do know for certain is that the doors will open, the refugees will come, and we will welcome them. To do this, we need to ensure funding needs for our agencies are maintained or increased to ensure the organizational capacity for as smooth a resettlement as possible. To this point, appropriate capacity for resettlement agencies to continue to do their important work couldn't be more imperative than at times like these when we will be called upon to support incoming Afghan refugees and SIVs. JFS of Western New York stands at the ready.”

Jeff Ogilvie, Deputy Director of Journey's End Refugee Services, said, “Journey's End Refugee Services implores the Biden Administration to expedite posthaste the exit of all Afghans and their dependents out of the country as part the massive airlift of U.S. personnel and civilians out of Afghanistan. Those who worked for our military, NGOs, government agencies, and media outlets are in the gravest of danger, and we have a moral and strategic responsibility to protect and resettle them because of their service to our country and its institutions. Once they are safe in a second country, then the proper security and medical vetting can begin for their transition to the United States, where they can finally live and work in safety and without fear in the City of Good Neighbors, as all refugees resettled in our community do. Journey's End stands ready to assist in this enormous, but doable, logistical effort to resettle those who gave so much to our mission in Afghanistan. The question is, do we as a nation have the political will and courage of our convictions to see it through?”

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