



## Monroe County Legislature

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Tim Henry  
Emergency Manager  
1190 Scottsville Rd., Suite 200  
Rochester, NY 14624

Mr. Henry,

The purpose of this letter is to ask whether Monroe County's Office of Emergency Management has studied the catastrophic snowstorm that struck Buffalo on December 23, 2022. Forty-six Erie County residents tragically lost their lives during this disaster. While the storm is considered a "generational" event, we know it could happen here, as we are subject to the same weather patterns and changing climate. Monroe County could perhaps improve its own response to snowstorms and other emergencies based upon comprehensive analysis of what happened in Erie County.

A *USA Today Network* story (*How Buffalo's catastrophic storm response failed a woman in life, then in death*, July 22, 2023) described horrific failures at all levels of government. A New York University Study (*Lessons Learned from the Buffalo Blizzard*, Kaufman et al) commissioned by Buffalo's mayor determined that the city was not prepared because of a lack of equipment, faulty public outreach, lack of planning in event of power failures, and historic inequities.

One thing that hindered Erie County's blizzard response was a lack of coordination between Erie County and the City of Buffalo. We appear to have much better systems in place in Monroe County and the City of Rochester, as our Covid response indicates. NYU, however, made recommendations that likely have relevance to Monroe County. Here are some:

- 1. Make sure the public understands the dangers of traveling and the importance of staying off the road *before* the storm hits.**
  - a. Communicate with the public early and often.
  - b. Messaging should be comprehensive and tailored to demographics, needs, and concerns.
  - c. Communications should reach and address the needs of the most vulnerable residents.
  - d. Encourage residents to sign up for emergency alerts and utilize other alert systems that don't require opting-in.

2. **Provide employers with clear guidance in disasters, so they know when to keep workers home. Consider a business hotline.**
  - a. Develop clear definitions for emergency, essential, and non-essential personnel.
  - b. Provide support to businesses and organizations to create their own emergency plans.

3. **Provide storm boxes with emergency supplies and food to those who need it in the days prior to the storm. Open warming shelters in areas without power.**

I am confident your team regularly reviews and updates emergency plans but would appreciate knowing if lessons from the Erie County storm have been incorporated into your ongoing preparations. Thank you for your work on keeping Monroe County residents safe.

Sincerely,



Rachel Barnhart – Legislator District 21