



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

For Immediate Release

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**COUNTY EXECUTIVE ADAM BELLO ANNOUNCES VETERANS
SERVICE AGENCY OBTAINED \$533,000 IN ONE-TIME LUMP
SUM PAYMENTS FOR TWO LOCAL AGENT ORANGE VETERANS**

VSA has helped obtain \$100 million in continuous payments and \$7 million in retroactive disability claims for local veterans this year

ROCHESTER, NY — Monroe County Executive Adam Bello today announced that the Veterans Service Agency (VSA) has helped obtain large financial settlements for local veterans who suffered from the effects of Agent Orange exposure. An Irondequoit woman has been awarded \$370,000 as a result of the VSA's effort to fight their case for compensation from the Veterans Administration. Another local veteran will receive \$163,000.

In each case, the veterans were exposed to Agent Orange while serving on board a US Navy ship during the Vietnam War. Under the [Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019](#), veterans who served within 12 nautical miles from the shore of Vietnam, or who had service in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides, such as Agent Orange, and may be entitled to service connection for any of the 14 conditions related to herbicide exposure.

The initial claims were denied and the appeals process took several years. The VSA continued to fight on each veteran's behalf, even after one veteran passed away. A judge ruled on the cases earlier this year, and the first check arrived this week. It's a life-changing amount of money that ensures these families can continue to live an independent life.

"I'm so grateful for the work that the VSA did on these cases, and the relentless efforts they continue to make to ensure veterans receive all of the benefits they're entitled to," **said County Executive Bello**. "We owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who served our country, who made sacrifices to ensure our freedom and preserve our way of life. I want to thank VSA Director Nick Steafnovic and his team for making sure we back our words of thanks with action, and they do that every day."

These awards and others like it reflect the VSA's ongoing efforts to help local veterans and their families receive all of the benefits that they earned through their military service. So far this year, the VSA has helped obtain \$100 million in continuous payments and \$7 million in

retroactive disability claims for local veterans. These veterans had their claims denied by the Veterans Administration, but the VSA went to court to fight these cases and won.

“The Monroe County Veterans Service Agency is a cornerstone in this community for good reason. The work that our staff performs is hard work, it’s emotional, and often the staff find themselves emotionally invested in fighting a case on behalf of a Veteran” **said VSA director Nick Stefanovic.** “That is why we bring in as much money as we do to the Veterans in Monroe County. We are fortunate to have a staff that is experienced, well trained, well supported, and most importantly determined to win these cases regardless of the challenges that face them. I’m proud to lead this staff and to carry out this work under the leadership and support of County Executive Adam Bello.”

Not only does the Monroe County VSA recover millions in these lump sum retroactive payments every year, they help veterans get access to monthly benefits, like VA disability compensation, veterans pensions, and survivor benefits for veterans family members. The VSA also connects veterans to life saving physical and mental health services and helps them find housing.

This year, the VSA also spearheaded the County’s effort to establish a first in the nation, County- led nature based therapy program. The program has helped reduce PTSD in veterans, improving their overall mental health, and helping them build a community.

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