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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

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Land of Sky Regional Council Board of Delegates unanimously passes a resolution in support of the Affordable Connectivity Program

Land of Sky Regional Council Board of Delegates unanimously passed a resolution at their February 28 meeting to support the extension of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The Board of Delegates are made up of elected officials representing our region's 20 local governments, economic development representatives and aging representatives. ACP provides up to \$30 per month to help eligible households pay for internet service and up to \$75 per month for households on tribal lands. Over 26,000 households in the Land of Sky region of Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania Counties are served by ACP. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has projected ACP will exhaust available funding by April 2024. Most private broadband providers support the extension of ACP and there has been bipartisan legislation introduced in Congress to extend this funding.

Land of Sky Regional Council launched WestNGN in partnership with many others to create more digitally connected communities in Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. These counties, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina, have historically been underfunded and had poorly accessible digital connectivity. WestNGN has worked to improve the significant gaps in broadband service and affordability in an effort to improve surrounding communities' access to vital services. Federal and state governments have provided historic funding to expand broadband to underserved communities. The extension of ACP will help support broadband expansion as providers will have a greater assurance that more households will connect to broadband internet service.

"We have been working on bridging the digital divide in in Western North Carolina for many years. The Affordable Connectivity Program is a critical part of the effort to extend broadband connectivity in our region. We believe without extension of ACP, less households will have access to broadband for critical needs like employment, education and healthcare," **Sara Nichols, Energy and Economic Development Manager with Land of Sky Regional Council.**

"The people of WNC deserve to thrive and so many critical resources live in a digital landscape. These funds will help us expand our work to bring greater connectivity options to our citizens. We are helping to find those impacted by lack of connectivity to get them the connection they need. We are excited to be moving forward on closing the digital divide". - **Sara Nichols, Land of Sky Energy and Economic Development Program Manager.**