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## PRESS RELEASE

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Land of-Sky Regional Council  
Wednesday, September 19, 2023

On Thursday, September 21<sup>st</sup> 2023 at 9:00 am Sara Nichols, Senior Planner with Land of Sky Regional Council, will testify before the US House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, Communication and Technology Subcommittee hearing on “Connecting Every American: The Future of Rural Broadband Funding”. To learn more about this hearing visit [Communications and Technology Subcommittee Hearing: "Connecting Every American: The Future of Rural Broadband Funding" \(house.gov\)](https://www.house.gov/committees/communications-and-technology/subcommittees/communications-and-technology-subcommittee-hearing-connecting-every-american-the-future-of-rural-broadband-funding)

Land of Sky Regional Council Board of Delegates has identified broadband expansion as one of their top priorities. Ms. Nichols testimony does not represent the official position of our Board but she will make remarks based on her experience as a professional planner and practitioner leading the Council’s broadband efforts. The Board of Delegates has not taken official action to endorse the specific details regarding federal broadband policy. The Council has focused on broadband expansion in Western North Carolina through West Next Generation Networks (NGN) and digital inclusion efforts. [Bridging the Digital Divide: \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com) In partnership with private broadband providers, the Council has leveraged tens of millions of dollars from federal, state, and local governments to expand broadband to underserved communities across the region. Land of Sky Regional Council has supported efforts throughout Western North Carolina to connect critical community landmarks like community centers and fire departments. The Council has also promoted downtown WIFI connectivity in small towns and rural communities, provided devices to underserved populations and connected public housing developments.

Over the course of her professional career, Ms. Nichols has helped secure more than \$40 million in broadband funding for the Western North Carolina region from a wide range of sources including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the state of North Carolina’s Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant program, and many other sources. These investments are helping connect over 15,000 unserved residents and businesses in Western North Carolina. Ms. Nichols holds a bachelor’s degree in biology from Mars Hill University. She has graced national stages as a speaker sharing insights on digital inclusion, the importance of broadband accessibility, and the intersection of technology and quality of life.

Ms. Nichols is the first employee of Land of Sky Regional Council to testify before Congress since former Executive Director Justin Hembree testified before Congress in 2017.

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