

## **Resolution Establishing the Wyoming Rural Lifeline Initiative for Sustainable Emergency Medical Services**

WHEREAS, Wyoming encompasses vast rural areas and faces critical challenges in maintaining emergency medical services (EMS) due to its expansive terrain, low population density (under 6.1 people per square mile), and limited local funding, resulting in ambulance deserts where response times exceed 25 minutes and affect vulnerable residents, including the elderly who comprise a significant portion of EMS users; and

WHEREAS, Wyoming experiences an estimated \$30 million annual EMS funding shortfall, with many ambulances exceeding 200,000 miles in service and relying heavily on volunteers who subsidize up to 50% of operational costs through unpaid labor, leading to inconsistent coverage in frontier regions; and

WHEREAS, the elderly and other vulnerable populations in rural Wyoming are disproportionately impacted by EMS gaps, as aging is involuntary and health emergencies are not optional, yet current funding mechanisms risk burdening seniors through property taxes or fees, contrary to principles of equity and civic responsibility where societal investments like education are shared without individual protest; and

WHEREAS, non-essential items such as alcohol, tobacco, vaping products, and potentially marijuana (if legalized) are subject to use taxes in comparable states like Montana, Colorado, and Alaska, generating \$50–300 million annually per state for health initiatives, including rural EMS grants and reimbursements, without imposing broad tax increases on essentials like fuel or food; and

WHEREAS, the federal Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) has allocated \$205 million to Wyoming in its first year (one of the highest per capita awards nationally), intended for rural healthcare sustainability, including EMS regionalization, equipment upgrades, workforce incentives, and the establishment of a perpetuity fund to generate ongoing revenue without reliance on volatile local taxes; and

WHEREAS, comparable rural states with low population densities, such as Montana (through Senate Joint Resolution 13 and House Bill 56, establishing provider assessments drawing \$30 million in federal matches), Colorado (using marijuana excise taxes for rural health grants), and Alaska (allocating sin tax revenue to remote EMS equipment), have successfully addressed similar EMS challenges through targeted use taxes, regional consolidations reducing costs by 20-30%, integration of telehealth to decrease unnecessary transports by 15-20%, and grants without imposing undue burdens on seniors, providing models for Wyoming to adapt; and

WHEREAS, innovative funding mechanisms, such as increasing Wyoming's low sin taxes on tobacco (from \$0.60 to \$1.70 per pack), vaping (from 15% to 30-50% wholesale), alcohol (20-50% excise hike), and potentially marijuana (15-20% retail if legalized), could generate \$10-30 million annually statewide, with a portion earmarked for EMS while allowing phased elimination of property taxes for seniors and aligning with national recommendations for protecting vulnerable populations in rural areas; and

WHEREAS, additional federal and state resources, including HRSA SIREN grants (up to \$250,000 for equipment and training), USDA zero-interest loans for ambulances, and Wyoming's SF 4 (boosting Medicaid reimbursements by \$2.6 million statewide), remain underutilized in addressing Wyoming's specific needs, such as helicopter integration for vast distances and workforce retention through loan forgiveness or tax credits;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Lincoln County Republican Party that the Wyoming State Legislature and Governor are urged to establish the Wyoming Rural Lifeline Initiative (WRLI), a pilot program modeled after successful strategies in Montana, Colorado, and Alaska, to ensure equitable and sustainable EMS funding:

1. Request an interim study of statewide EMS planning, coordination, and funding, similar to Montana's Senate Joint Resolution 13 (SJ13, 2025), assessing current capabilities, future demands over five years, resource needs, and potential recognition of EMS as an essential statewide service, with a report to the next legislative session including recommendations for sin tax reallocations;
2. 2. Prioritize allocation from Wyoming's \$205 million RHTP award for EMS enhancements across the state, including the perpetuity fund to provide ongoing subsidies for low-volume ambulances (\$250,000 per unit in regionalized systems) and one-time grants for equipment, telehealth integration, and community paramedicine programs;
3. Pilot a senior exemption or rebate program within any EMS funding mechanisms (e.g., vehicle fees or subscriptions), ensuring no additional burdens on elderly residents, and phase in property tax elimination for seniors using sin tax revenue, positioning Wyoming as a national model for equitable rural healthcare;
4. Increase sin taxes on non-essentials (tobacco, vaping, alcohol, and potentially marijuana) to generate dedicated revenue for the WRLI perpetuity fund, drawing federal Medicaid matches similar to Montana's House Bill 56 (HB56, 2025), while maintaining low taxes on essentials like fuel and food;
5. Mandate and incentivize regional consolidations with neighboring counties (e.g., Lincoln, Teton, and Sublette) to share resources, dispatch, and helicopter services, drawing from successful models in Colorado and Texas to achieve 20-30% cost reductions and improved response times;

6. Expand workforce incentives, such as EMT scholarships, loan forgiveness, and tax credits, to address volunteer shortages and ensure 24/7 coverage in frontier areas;
7. Advocate federally through the National Association of Counties (NACo) for enhanced reimbursements under the PEAKS Act and EMS ROCS legislation, tailored to mountainous and low-density regions and push for reallocation from non-essential federal spending to rural priorities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Wyoming Governor, State Legislature, Department of Health, and U.S. Congressional delegation for immediate consideration and action.

**Adopted by the Lincoln County Republican Party Convention, March 7, 2026**

**HEALTH AND SOCIETY**