Resolution Supporting the efforts of the Federal Communications Commission and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners to promote Lifeline Awareness

WHEREAS, In the world today, everyone needs reliable and affordable telephone service because it provides a lifeline to emergency help and is a vital link to friends and family; and

WHEREAS, Not everyone can afford the connection fees or monthly costs to have a telephone; and

WHEREAS, The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the State public utility commissions have joined in a collaborative effort to help make telephone service more affordable for the nation’s low-income consumers by providing a discount on the connecting and monthly recurring charge for local telephone service; and

WHEREAS, The Lifeline Assistance and Link-Up Programs offer tremendous benefits for eligible consumers in America that make basic telephone service more affordable; and

WHEREAS, Link-Up is a program that provides a discount of 50 percent (up to $30) of the consumer’s initial connection fee for telephone service; and

WHEREAS, The Lifeline Assistance Program enables eligible low-income consumers to save a substantial amount on their basic monthly telephone service fee depending on the State where the consumer lives; and

WHEREAS, Residents of tribal lands may be eligible for additional savings on their basic monthly phone bill; and

WHEREAS, Consumers may be eligible for the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs if they participate in at least one of the following federal programs: Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8), or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Plan; and

WHEREAS, National statistics reveal that citizens who qualify for Lifeline and Link-Up may not be aware of benefits of the programs; and

WHEREAS, According to the 2002 U.S. Census, 34.6 million Americans were under the national poverty level while only 6.6 million received reduced telephone rates under the Lifeline program; and

WHEREAS, The number of U.S. families slipping into poverty is increasing with 35.9 million below the level in 2003, according to the U.S. Census poverty data; and

WHEREAS, The FCC and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) believe it is vital to the public interest and economic wellbeing of the nation that Lifeline and Link-Up Programs be better promoted to facilitate greater knowledge and participation in the Programs; and
WHEREAS, The NARUC urges States that are not designated as “Default States” in the FCC order implementing the new eligibility criteria to amend their rules to allow consumers to be eligible for Lifeline and Link-Up when the consumer’s income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or if the consumer participates in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or the National School Free Lunch Program; and

WHEREAS, The FCC and the NARUC support the Joint Board’s recommendation that the FCC provide consumer outreach guidelines to States and carriers to improve Lifeline and Link-Up subscribership; and

WHEREAS, The FCC and NARUC have joined together in the best tradition of federalism to design and implement a comprehensive action plan to increase Lifeline awareness across the country; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Directors of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, convened in its July 2005 Summer Committee Meeting in Austin, Texas, urges the FCC and State commissions and telecommunications providers to support greater efforts to educate qualified consumers about the benefits of Lifeline and Link-Up in hopes to achieve the goal of Universal Service.

Sponsored by the Committee on Consumer Affairs  
Adopted by the NARUC Board of Directors July 27, 2005