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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WILKES COUNTY STRENGTHENS STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARATION
Prohibitions on gatherings of 50 or more, fewer exemptions granted**

[Wilkesboro, NC, March 19, 2020] – The County of Wilkes and the towns of Wilkesboro, North Wilkesboro, and Ronda have updated their joint State of Emergency declaration. This update extends the prohibitions on gatherings and removes the exemption for religious gatherings. This enhanced State of Emergency declaration gives the county and municipalities additional legal and administrative tools to fight against the spread of coronavirus and COVID-19.

Specifically, the declaration now prohibits mass gatherings of fifty (50) or more people together at the same time and location. This prohibition is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) as a way to limit opportunities for person-to-person transmission of the virus. The previous declaration prohibited gatherings of one-hundred (100) or more.

The enhanced declaration also removes the exemption for “church-related and/or faith based services and events.” Weekly church services of fifty (50) or more people are now prohibited. Church services of one-hundred (100) or more were previously prohibited by Governor Roy Cooper’s Executive Order No. 117 issued March 14, 2020.

Wilkes County Board of Commissioners Chairman Eddie Settle, Wilkesboro Mayor Mike Inscore, and North Wilkesboro Mayor Robert Johnson sought input from leaders of the Wilkes County faith community before issuing the declaration.

Settle, Inscore, and Johnson asked the faith leaders to spread the word through channels that services will not be held and that social distancing should be maintained for the health and safety of the Wilkes County community.

“The faith community can be instrumental in helping local governments and communities,” said Pastor Jamie McGuire of Purlear Baptist Church, “we can be very effective in the days to come.”

The White House recommends that no gathering larger than ten (10) people be held, but has not mandated such a prohibition.

The State of Emergency will be in place through April 30, 2020.