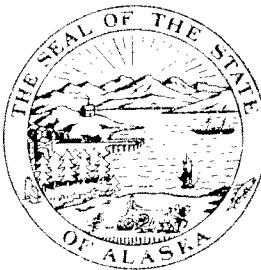


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Senator Linda Menard

Senate District G

Senate Bill 174 Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 174 will boost the number of Alaska's health care providers by making it more financially feasible and attractive for a recent graduate to come back to the state.

We now have the WAMI program, which provides educational opportunities for medical students. But for dentists, there is a massive gap in educational opportunities.

This is where Senate Bill 174 comes in.

There's no doubt about Alaska's shortage of dentists. This has been a long-time problem in rural Alaska. In other areas of the state there are an extremely small percentage of providers taking Medicaid. As the exodus of retiring dentists continues, and recent graduates are wooed by Lower 48 medical clinics, the problem worsens and Alaska loses.

A well crafted loan forgiveness program will entice Alaskans graduating in dentistry, pharmacy and optometry to come home for their careers.

Senate Bill 174 accomplishes this by setting requirements for loan forgiveness.

Working with the Western Interstate Commissions for Higher Education (WICHE), Alaska residents will be able to attend professional health care programs not offered in the Alaska university system. (WICHE is a regional organization adopted in the 1950s. Its purpose is to create resource sharing among higher education systems in the American west.)

The bill establishes a minimum number of supported Alaska participants in dentistry, optometry, and pharmacy. The bill also sets the loan interest rate for the PSE loan in statute at 7.5 percent and provides zero percent interest during the participants' in school period.

Senate Bill 174 will establish a forgiveness program entitlement of up to 25 percent loan forgiveness for the participants who meet these criteria: They must be residents of the state of Alaska, practice in the state and maintain their license to practice.

Please help me support retaining new dentists and other medical professionals in Alaska, for the entire state's benefit.