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March 27, 2009

The Honorable Paul Seaton, Chair  
House Education Committee  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 102  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: HB 204 (Dahlstrom)—Support

Dear Chair Seaton:

On behalf of the members of AARP in Alaska, we encourage you and your colleagues on the House Education Committee to support HB 204, authored by Representative Nancy Dahlstrom and co-sponsored by Representative Beth Kerttula.

It is no secret that Alaska has a shortage of physicians which is expected to get worse over the next few years. AARP members in many Alaska communities already tell us that they are unable to find a physician who will accept them as Medicare beneficiaries.

The one bright spot in this shortage is the WWAMI program which has traditionally provided ten slots for family practice physicians to spend their residency in Alaska. Senator Meyer's bill last year increased the number to twenty. Upon completion of their medical education, most of these physicians have chosen to stay here and practice in our cities as well as in our remote communities.

You and your colleagues have seen the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force report produced jointly by the University of Alaska and the Department of Health and Social Services. This excellent report should serve us as a roadmap for our future directions in physician training.

The former exodus of Alaska retirees has been reversed over the past few years. Because of our improved health services and provider community, older Alaskans have determined that they can remain here after retirement, close to their friends and families.

If older Alaskans are unable to find a physician willing to see them, we will be back with the situation of retirees leaving the state so they can be assured of access to health professionals.

HB 204 offers us another real meaningful opportunity to begin to meet this need. Adding another four family practice residents to bring the total to twenty-four won't solve our problem but it is an excellent step to address our long term needs for an expanded physician workforce.

Our AARP members, your constituents, want to stay here after retirement. An affirmative vote on HB 204 will help accomplish that. AARP requests an "AYE" vote on HB 204.

Should you have any questions about our position, please feel free to contact me (586-3637) or Patrick Luby, AARP Advocacy Director (907-762-3314).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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CC: Vice-Chair Cathy Munoz  
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Representative Bob Buch  
Representative Berta Gardner  
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