

Alaska State Medical Association

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April 6, 2010

Honorable Mike Hawker
Honorable Bill Stoltze
Co-Chairs
State of Alaska
House of Representatives
House Finance Committee
Room 519
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska

Re: HB392 – Recruitment Incentives for Certain Health Professionals

Dear Representatives Hawker and Stoltze:

The Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) represents physicians statewide and is primarily concerned with the health of all Alaskans.

ASMA strongly supports HB392. It was one of the stakeholders that came together to develop the concept for loan repayment and direct incentive program proscribed in HB392. This measure will provide for an effective recruitment tool for physicians as well as other health care professionals in short supply.

Alaska competes with all other states in the recruitment of an ever shrinking pool of physicians practicing general internal medicine or family medicine. Currently only about 2% of medical school graduates are choosing general internal medicine or family medicine residencies. 44 of those states with whom Alaska competes for these physicians already have a loan repayment or direct incentive program.

HB392 will help to solve Alaska's chronic and acute (in certain practice specialties) physician workforce shortages. A study recently reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association that the shortages have been further exacerbated by a reduction in the hours that physicians are engaging in patient care. That study is "Trends in the Work Hours of Physicians in the United States", JAMA, February 24, 2010.

This study concluded that in the decade from 1996 to 2006, the hours of physician patient care decreased by 5.7%. The study concluded in part "...A 5.7% decrease in hours worked by nonresident physicians in patient care, out of a workforce of approximately 630,000 in 2007, is equivalent to a loss of approximately 36,000 physicians from the workforce, had the hours worked per physician not changed."

Massachusetts in 2006 adopted its own form of health system reform that resulted in more of its citizens having insurance coverage. The result was that not enough physicians were available to meet that increased demand for care. With the passage of health system reform at the federal level adding to those citizens with insurance coverage, if what happened in Massachusetts follows suit, the increased demand for care will outpace the number of physicians available to provide the necessary care.

HB392 is needed to help put Alaska on a more level playing field with other states trying to recruit for the same limited and shrinking supply of physicians needed to provide the care.

ASMA urges you to support HB392 and to expeditiously take action to insure enactment of this critical measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James J. Jordan", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

By: James. J. Jordan, Executive Director
For: The Alaska State Medical Association.