

Alaska State Medical Association

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May 13, 2019

Representative Jonathon Kreiss-Tompkins
State Capitol, Room 411
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 159 WWAMI Repayment

Dear Representative Kreiss-Tompkins:

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

ASMA strongly supports the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho (WWAMI) program providing access to health care and medical provider education not otherwise available to Alaskan students seeking to become medical professionals.

The Alaska State Medical Association conducted their yearly Generally Assembly meeting on May 4 in Anchorage. This is their annual meeting open to all members. At the Generally Assembly meeting, in an effort to retain the WWAMI program, the attendees unanimously supported increasing the repayment rate from 50% to 100% for students not returning to Alaska. ASMA recognizes the pressure to reduce state funding and hopes that this policy change will help in maintaining this critical program. House Bill 159 would enact this policy.

Alaska's WWAMI students take classes at the University of Alaska Anchorage for the first and second years of medical school paying tuition to UAA. After the first two years students spend the next two years in clinical rotations and while tuition during these years is paid to UW, via WWAMI membership Alaska residents pay in-state tuition rates thus increasing the ability of Alaskans to attend medical school. Alaska currently has 43 clerkship sites with over 170 participating physicians and approximately 240 students rotating through the Alaska sites. The regional medical education concept reduces overall costs by eliminating the need for each state to recreate an entire medical school system. The program has been recognized by the Association of American Medical Colleges with the Outstanding Community Service Award and has been identified as the nation's top primary-care, family medicine and rural medicine training school by *U.S. News & World Report* for over 20 years.

Alaska remains one of only a few states without a medical school while at the same time experiencing an increasing shortage of health care professionals. This shortage will likely continue to worsen with increased demands on utilization of healthcare as the state's population continues to increase in size and age. In addition, Alaska competes with all

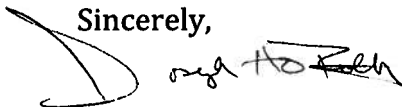
other states in the recruitment of an ever-shrinking pool of physicians practicing general internal medicine or family medicine. The overwhelming majority of those states with which Alaska competes for these professionals offer loan repayment or other direct incentive programs.

With the state's continued participation in the program, WWAMI will continue to provide approximately 20 Alaska students every year the opportunity to attend the University of Washington School of Medicine. But it's not just the Alaska WWAMI students that provide a benefit to our state. By participating in the program Alaska attracts medical students from the other States that are participating members exposing them to Alaska through student rotations. Without participation new physicians from this Northwestern region will no longer rotate through Alaska and significantly reduce the number of WWAMI students from practicing in Alaska. Alaska is able to retain many of these out-of-state students because of the exposure to Alaska during their rotations. Both the Alaska students who return and the non-resident students who choose to reside in Alaska due to our participation in the program contribute to a high return on Alaska's investment in the program.

While we absolutely appreciate the magnitude of the State's current fiscal situation and recognize the very tough decisions before you the reduction in physicians will adversely impact costs to all payors including Medicaid, Medicare, Tri-Care, Workers' Compensation rates, PERS/TRS health care costs, and privately insured. It is a fact that lack of access to health care, especially primary care, ultimately results in increased costs.

ASMA supports HB 159 and the continuation of Alaska's participation in the WWAMI program. I am available if you need in additional information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Roth", written over a large, stylized flourish that starts with a long horizontal stroke and loops back.

Joe Roth, MD
President
Alaska State Medical Association