

Re: Support for HB 78 Incentives for Certain Medical Providers

September, 12, 2011

Dear Members of the House Finance Subcommittee:

Because the health care workforce shortage in Alaska is reducing health care access for our state's residents, the UAA Department of Health Sciences Physician Assistant Program strongly supports HB 78 to establish a loan repayment and incentive program to allow Alaska to compete with the lower 48 in recruitment of providers from a shrinking national pool.

The mission of the UAA Department of Health Sciences Physician Assistant Program is to recruit and train PAs to work in underserved areas of Alaska. Our PA students graduate with a debt burden of over \$100,000. HB 78 will add important financial incentives to allow our students to choose practices in primary care underserved settings.

With alarming and rising vacancy rates, Alaska is posed for a crisis without intervention. Alaska is one of only five states without a state-sponsored support-for-service program such as a loan repayment and incentive program and is losing ground. The competition for recruitment of providers is very difficult. Currently only 2% of medical students nationally are choosing the primary care field; more than 90 pharmacist vacancies exist in Alaska; many communities have inadequate access to dentists; physician assistants and nurse practitioners are increasingly difficult to recruit; nurses, dental hygienists, psychologists, licensed certified social workers, and physical therapists are all in short supply in Alaska.

The Alaska Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program provides an important part of the solution to the workforce shortage Alaska faces. The proposal was developed after careful review of national studies of best practices for workforce recruitment and retention and input from stakeholders statewide, including consideration of factors unique to Alaska. More cost-efficient and results-producing than other methods, loan repayment and incentives have been shown to effectively help alleviate shortage problems in other states. Alaska will realize a 100% return on state investment: every penny spent will mean a practitioner was filling a vacancy in Alaska.

The UAA Department of Health Sciences Physician Assistant Program supports HB 78 and urges passage of this important legislation. Your active steps to assure the establishment of the Alaska Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program are greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

John Riley PA-C, MS
UAA Physician Assistant Program Coordinator
