



Alaska Pharmacists Association

January 11, 2010

RE: Support of SB 174- Professional Student Exchange Program

Pharmacists improve patient care. Chronic diseases cost the health care system about 75 cents on every health care dollar spent. Inappropriate use of medications leads to adverse events, costing the health care system \$177 billion each year. Trained clinically, with expertise in medication use, pharmacists can and do ensure patients properly utilize their medications, improving health care outcomes, reducing overall health care costs. Every person has a right to have access to pharmacists and pharmacist provided care.

Because the health care workforce shortage in Alaska is reducing health care access for our state's residents, putting Alaskans in jeopardy, the Alaska Pharmacists Association strongly supports the concept of a state-sponsored loan repayment and incentive program to allow Alaska to compete with the lower 48 in recruitment of pharmacists from a limited and shrinking national pool.

The shortage will continue with the aging of the population and the increase in medication use needed as more state residents decide to retire in Alaska. Alaska is the only state currently without a School of Pharmacy and one of 5 states without loan repayment program. These are all factors contributing to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining pharmacists, including our own residents to relocate to Alaska.

The Alaska Pharmacists Association (AkPhA) supports SB174 and its companion HB235 that would provide funding for loan forgiveness in professional programs currently not offered at the University of Alaska. Alaska students wishing to pursue a post graduate program in dentistry, optometry and pharmacy must attend an out of state school incurring higher tuition and loan debt. SB174 would provide incentives for Alaska residents to return to Alaska upon completion of the above post graduate programs with a service commitment in the state. Alaska continues to have a cycle of a shortage of pharmacists with a 25% vacancy rate in 2007.

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