

**From:** [Andy Elsberg](#)  
**To:** [Senate Finance Committee](#)  
**Subject:** HB72 Elimination of Funding for WWAMI  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 3:57:26 PM

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Dear Senators

My name is Andrew Elsberg. I am an Emergency Physician at Providence Alaska Medical Center and a graduate of the WWAMI program class of 2008. I would like to comment on the proposal to cut the funding for the state medical school program, WWAMI.

As a graduate of the program I am keenly aware of the impact the loss of this program would have on the state. Not only would we lose a critical recruitment tool to supply physicians to Alaska, especially rural and primary care, we would also lose the ability for Alaskans to be a part of one of the finest medical schools in the country. I am sure you have seen the statistics. On average 47% of WWAMI Alaska students return to practice in Alaska, and with our clinical rotations we end up with a number of WWAMI students from other states choosing Alaska to practice medicine. Our overall rate of return is 84%. You need to understand that this is a phenomenal rate of return.

WWAMI graduates are our primary care providers' s both rural and urban, deliver our children, are our children' s doctor, the ER doc who sees us in the middle of the night, the surgeon who takes out your appendix or stops the bleeding after a rollover on the Seward Highway, the anesthesiologist who safely gets us through a surgery, our oncologists, ENTs, plastic surgeons, cardiologists, orthopedists....WWAMI has educated Alaskans who provide care across the specialties. WWAMI allows us to improve our education for all levels of healthcare professionals with support for simulation labs, interaction across professional students, and a framework for clinical rotations. WWAMI helps ensure that the people doing the education for health sciences are here, in Alaska, accessible to Alaskans and focused on unique Alaska issues.

WWAMI is relatively cheap. It would cost Alaska much more money per student to have its own medical school, and there is no way Alaska would meet its physician workforce needs with permanent residents if we lose WWAMI. Would you prefer your primary care doctor or specialist to live in Alaska and be accessible when you need them, or would you prefer an increase in locums who are not a part of our community, and more importantly not available much of the time? While we have some great locums who come to Alaska and help provide care, overall medical care is better when physicians live in our communities.

The WWAMI program is absolutely top notch. During my interviews for residency it was clear that a WWAMI education is highly respected at every institution that I visited including a number of the top Emergency Medicine programs in the country. When I entered emergency medicine residency at one of my top choices it was very clear that with the combination of UAA and UW classroom education, University of Washington affiliated hospital rotations, rural Alaska rotations, and community medicine rotations in Anchorage and Fairbanks I was much better prepared for residency than most of my classmates.

Harder to quantify are the other advantages of WWAMI. After rotating in Anchorage for pediatrics, OB/Gyn, anesthesia, and hospitalist medicine at Providence, ANMC, and JBER, Fairbanks for surgery, Petersburg for family medicine, and with brief visits to Barrow,

Unalakleet, and Nome as part of my education I made connections with providers all over the state. I have an understanding of how our statewide medical system works, including private, military, VA, and Native healthcare. I use these connections to facilitate better care for my patients on a daily basis. When I send a burn patient to Harborview I can better communicate with providers there because I trained in the ER and burn unit at Harborview. These are important connections that we lose if we lose WWAMI. Providers moving to Alaska, trained outside of Alaska have to learn all of this to effectively practice here. Providers who can understand that the only way home is by plane, boat or ferry, know what a honey bucket is, have a clue what level of care is available in your village or regional hub, and understand how long it takes to get someone from Deadhorse to Anchorage during an emergency are an important part of our physician community. WWAMI ensures we have high quality providers with this important knowledge base.

Now that I am back practicing in Alaska I, like many WWAMI graduates, am still active in WWAMI. I train medical students in the ER with the goal of providing a quality medical education, but also that the good ones will come back, and be a part of this amazing and very unique medical community.

Alaska can afford WWAMI. In fact Alaska can not afford to lose WWAMI.

Thank you for your service to our state,

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