

From: [Harold Johnston](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: Support Alaska WWAMI medical education program
Date: Tuesday, March 24, 2015 11:50:19 AM

Dear Committee Finance,

I am a 5th generation lifelong Alaskan and a Family Physician. I have spent the last 19 years as a medical educator in Alaska. I co-authored the Alaska Physician Workforce report in 2006. I am a WWAMI graduate.

Alaska has a shortage of physicians, especially in rural areas, and especially in primary care. These are the most difficult to recruit positions in the US. As the national physician shortage worsens over the next two decades, competition for physicians will become ever more challenging, and, without our own physician production system, Alaska will fall farther behind.

In good times and in bad all states provide for medical education of their populace. Alaska is fortunate to have one of the most effective and lowest-cost systems for this in the US, in the WWAMI program. This program has developed over the last 44 years because it serves us very well.

Dismantling this program would be a huge mistake. In the future if we are to try to recover from its loss, we will have to spend many times its cost to rebuild a program that would never be its equal in quality or effectiveness.

WWAMI is a collaborative medical school among universities in five NW states. Operating for over 44 years, the program has consistently provided some of the best and brightest Alaskans access to the medical education and training necessary for them to return home and serve their communities, helping to address our state's shortage of physicians. The intent language included in the House budget will eliminate the program.

The elimination of this program will have long term impacts for Alaska's health care system. Without the program, physician shortages will worsen and recruitment challenges will increase. The result will be an increase in health care costs and a decrease in health care quality as we are no longer able to "grow our own" physicians. The WWAMI program is a success and a critical part of the state education and health care infrastructure.

To protect the health of all Alaskans, remove the intent language to eliminate the program from the budget. This program represents one of the most efficient and cost-effective tools Alaska has available to invest in our health delivery system and the health of our people.

Please ensure funding for the WWAMI program continues.

Sincerely,

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