

From: [Katt C](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: In Regards to FY 2016 State Operating Budget, HB72
Date: Thursday, March 26, 2015 10:00:17 PM

Dear Dear Finance Committee,

I want this to serve as my testimony for HB72 and specifically with regard to the WWAMI budget.

I am writing in opposition to the FY 2016 State Operating Budget, HB72, the intent language of which will destroy the Alaska WWAMI Medical School program. The WWAMI program is one of our nation's top Medical School programs, ranking number one in Primary Care and in the top 10 in virtually all other categories. WWAMI is the only program that enables Alaskan students to pay in-state tuition to a medical school and complete most of their training in the state. WWAMI also has a mandatory loan payback - upon completing their training, students must either return to the state to practice, or pay back the funding that the state provided. The WWAMI partnership with the University of Washington allows the State of Alaska to pay significantly less per student than other states pay for their medical students, puts students through top of the line training in a nationally renowned program, and draws physicians back to the state upon completion of their training. Where else can you get so much from one program?

Our state faces a dire need for physicians, particularly in the Primary Care fields, and for rural care - WWAMI focuses heavily on both of these areas. The program trains and retains Alaskan students - who better to care for Alaskans, than other Alaskans? Without the WWAMI program, Alaskan students will be forced to leave the state to attain their medical education, and many will feel compelled to change their residency in order to pay in-state tuition to their institution. Once students have established residency outside of Alaska, and settled down in another state, they will be far less inclined to return to the state to practice. This will dramatically increase the healthcare disparity that our state already struggles with, and will contribute to Brain Drain of our state.

I come from a long line of Alaskans, my great grandfather Bill Stoecker was an Alaskan Pioneer; Alaska is the home of my family, and the home of my heart. My father was in the Armed Forces, which often required us to live out of state, but I always knew that I wanted to return home to Alaska. The problem I struggled with was, as much as I wanted to return to Alaska and make my life there, I also wanted to become a physician and Alaska does not have a medical school. When I first heard about WWAMI it was the answer to everything I ever could have asked for!

I completed my Undergraduate training at the University of Alaska Anchorage where I became heavily involved in the UAA Premed Program, fostered relationships with the WWAMI administration, and worked hard to do whatever it would take to become a competitive applicant for a spot in the WWAMI program. Through my involvement in the Premed club I also met my partner, Shane Rall, a fellow premed student. Shane and I applied to medical school together, knowing that WWAMI was not only our sole in-state option, but also our best and likely only chance of both being accepted into one program. We were both accepted into the WWAMI entering class of 2013 and could not have been more overjoyed. Together we are completing our medical training in this amazing program, and making plans for our future. We both plan to return to Alaska after completing our residencies to practice medicine. I have a strong interest in Primary Care – a fire that has been fueled by the WWAMI program's strong Primary Care focus. In addition to its Primary Care focus, WWAMI has a very strong emphasis on Rural Care. At first I was hesitant until this past summer when, as part of our WWAMI training, we completed what is called a "RUOP," or

Rural Opportunity - a 6 week Primary Care clinical experience in a rural or underserved community. After completing RUOP Shane and I agreed that not only do we want to return to Alaska, we both want to return to practice in and be a part of a small Alaskan community. When I read that the WWAMI program was facing elimination, I could not have been more appalled. In fact, I first brushed it off as an impossibility, a lot of talk that would never become action, because the idea of shutting down a program that offers so much to the state seemed too preposterous to even consider. As I realized that it was much more than just talk, I was horrified. The Alaska WWAMI Medical School program is enabling me to live my dreams of becoming an Alaskan physician, it fed my passion for Primary Care, and inspired in me the desire to become a part of a small Alaskan community. And I am just one student among many, one link in a long line of practicing physicians and eager medical students that WWAMI has inspired and encouraged to return to Alaska to provide care to our state's residents.

Dismantling a program that provides such invaluable return is a mistake - shutting down the program will do irreparable damage to our state, and will cost so much more in the long run. Please consider these comments and ensure the continuance of a program that provides vital services and benefits to our state.

Sincerely,

Katrina Crouch

Second Year WWAMI Medical Student