

**From:** [Kyleen J Luhrs](#)  
**To:** [Senate Finance Committee](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony on HB72 from current WWAMI student  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 12:40:48 PM  
**Attachments:** [WWAMI fact sheet final \(1\).pdf](#)

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Dear Alaska Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to provide personal testimony regarding the priceless opportunities afforded for Alaskan students and Alaskan citizens by the WWAMI program, which are currently being threatened by HB72.

What I would like to remind you of is the fact that the University of Washington School of Medicine has been consistently ranked #1 in the country for primary care, year after year. It is amazing that Alaskan students have seats reserved for them to access this high quality medical education. WWAMI students come from all different backgrounds, but this was the big draw for me that made WWAMI my top choice.

I was born and raised in Ketchikan, Alaska and after graduating from Kayhi, earned Biology and Psychology degrees at the University of Denver. I worked hard and was in a position to be a competitive applicant for medical school. I only applied to three programs: John Hopkins Medical School, Harvard Medical School, and the University of Washington School of Medicine WWAMI program. I interviewed at Harvard Medical School and at WWAMI. I knew that if I was accepted by both programs, it would be an agonizing decision. Luckily, fate led me to WWAMI and I am now two years into pursuing my dream of receiving the best primary care training available in the country.

I'm sure you have received countless phone calls, emails, and testimonies about the benefit of the WWAMI program to Alaska, and how important the program is for the state both economically and for the health of Alaskans. I would like to reiterate just a few of those facts:

First, I would like to point out this program is extremely cost-effective, and an unbelievable bargain for the quality of education Alaskan students receive. Alaska currently pays only half of the national average (\$49,000 per student vs. \$102,000) compared to other states to support medical education.

Second, to increase the healthcare workforce, the program works. 84% of WWAMI grads return to Alaska to serve Alaskans. This includes not only Alaskan students, but also other UW medical students who are exposed to our beautiful state through unique clerkship opportunities that would be lost with the elimination of the program. It has been consistently shown that doctors are most likely to practice medicine in the areas where they do their training. Without opportunities to train in Alaska, it will become increasingly hard to recruit doctors to our state. Plus, with the current shortages of primary care physicians, it would be devastating to cut off this stream of the best-trained primary care providers in the country.

My older sister, Kayla Luhrs, is also a WWAMI graduate. We both plan to move back to Alaska to practice medicine, motivated largely by the financial incentive provided by the WWAMI program, and the connections made during our clinical training. Without these tools, it would be much more difficult for us to move back to Alaska so early in our medical careers, if at all. For the countless students who aspire to follow this same path in order to receive an outstanding education that allows them to serve their fellow Alaskans, I urge you to please retain the WWAMI program.

Sincerely,

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p.s. Please find attached a quick reference fact sheet that should be useful in your deliberations.