

**From:** [Brigit Noon](#)  
**To:** [Senate Finance Committee](#)  
**Subject:** Support Alaska WWAMI medical education program  
**Date:** Thursday, March 26, 2015 1:40:18 AM

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Dear Committee Finance,

Dear Members of the Alaska Senate,

I was born and raised in Fairbanks, AK and am currently a pre-medical student in my Junior year of college at Montana State University. I will be applying to medical school during the 2015/2016 application cycle. It has recently come to my attention that my WWAMI application may be one of the last of the Alaska WWAMI program. This is deeply concerning to me for a number of reasons.

Alaska is state that already struggles to offer its residents accessible, high quality health care. There is already a distinct lack of physicians – in particular primary care physicians – who are working to meet the basic mental and physical health needs of Alaskans. The physician shortage is worse in rural areas and villages. One factor contributing to this “doctor deficit” is that Alaska is one of just a few states in the nation that does not have its own medical school. Considering the overall status of health care in Alaska, the state should be working to help increase the number of physicians working in Alaska, not eliminating the one program that is already serving this purpose.

Since 1971, the WWAMI program has granted Alaskan students access to a medical education, and it is now the largest source of new doctors for the state of Alaska. There are currently over 200 WWAMI graduates practicing in Alaska, which composes almost 15% of the total number of doctors. The financial incentive that WWAMI provides for students to return to Alaska after medical school is essential to the program’s success. For the students, WWAMI makes attending medical school accessible and affordable. For the state, WWAMI provides an influx of much-needed young physicians. To cut this program will effectively eliminate the possibility and incentive for Alaskan students aspiring to be doctors to earn their degree and eventually serve as physicians in urban and rural Alaska.

Every year that WWAMI is defunded, the state will lose 20 future physicians. It may be true that the state is struggling to support the program, but Alaskans cannot afford to lose this many doctors. Primary care physicians will become so overbooked that they will not be able to meet with patients on short notice. Whole villages will be without access to health care at all. Minor health complications will be ignored until they become more difficult and expensive to treat. All of these issues amount to a higher overall cost of health care coupled with drastically reduced accessibility. When considering the proposed budget cut, I urge you to consider that it will have negative implications far beyond just the future WWAMI students.

Sincerely,

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