



American College of
Emergency Physicians®

ALASKA CHAPTER

ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE 

Representative Andy Josephson
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: House Bill 229 – Alaska Higher Education Investment Fund

Dear Representative Josephson:

The Alaska Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians represents Emergency Department Physicians across Alaska. We are writing to voice our strong support of HB 229 making clear the Fund is not subject to the Constitutional Budget Reserve “sweep” at the end of the Fiscal Year protecting the funding source for both Alaska Performance Scholarships and the WWAMI program. These funds should not be subject to the political brinkmanship we have seen in recent years. We strongly support the WWAMI program as a vital tool for maintaining and growing access to high quality medical care for Alaskans.

The WWAMI program has a record of successfully training and retaining Alaskan physicians. The University of Washington School of Medicine has consistently ranked as one of the top medical schools in the country and providing access to this program is highly advantageous to Alaskan students. Without this affiliation Alaska would be the only state in the entire country without either a medical school or an affiliation with an out of state medical school for resident students. Alaska already has significant challenges recruiting and retaining physicians of all specialties and loss of this program would further challenges that Alaskan students face when seeking medical school acceptance.

Additionally we support expansion of the program in favor of starting an Alaskan medical school. Alaska has few residency programs and still lacks in many subspecialty areas. The opportunity to have training and build connections and contacts in Alaska plus the unique opportunities present at the world class facilities in Washington State are ideal for medical training. Graduates of the WWAMI program have been consistently successful at obtaining highly competitive residency opportunities in many specialties. Each year there are many more applicants to the WWAMI program than there are spots available necessitating that many Alaskan students still go out of state to other medical schools for training. This would suggest that there is a strong competitive pool for additional capacity in the program.

The WWAMI program has a good record of recruiting physicians back to Alaska. The opportunity to experience some or all training in Alaska and financial debt forgiveness programs

for returning to practice in Alaska have been very successful at retaining WWAMI graduates in Alaska. In the event that WWAMI graduates do not return to practice in Alaska there are very significant financial penalties that result in payback of all loans plus interest.

In addition to recruiting primary care physicians the program has also resulted in the training and retention of a number of specialists which are vital to building and maintaining access to high quality healthcare for Alaskans in Alaska. As emergency physicians we still routinely facilitate transfers out of state for burns, facial fractures, complex pelvic fractures, ruptured brain aneurysms, leukemia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning, pediatric critical care, and other conditions due to inability to access these services in Alaska. In addition to great expense, these transfers increase the likelihood of death and serious adverse outcomes due to delays, as well as great difficulty for patients and their loved ones.

We support a mechanism for ensuring stable funding for the program. The threats to program funding over the past several years has resulted in damage to the reputation and prestige of the program. Current and prospective students have been rightfully concerned about the stability of the program and have in some cases sought training elsewhere due to these concerns. It is essential that stable protected funding be secured to ensure the long term viability of this program and we support any efforts in this regard.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Thomas Quimby MD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Quimby MD', with a stylized, cursive script.

American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), Alaska Chapter Vice President

Nicholas Papacostas MD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Papacostas', with a stylized, cursive script.

ACEP, Alaska Chapter President