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Via Electronic Communication: housefinance@akleg.gov

**Finance Committee Co-Chairs
House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol**

**Testimony of Sonny Ramaswamy, President
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
July 18, 2019
Redmond, Washington**

Co-Chairs and Members of the Finance Committee.

My name is Sonny Ramaswamy. I currently serve as the president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities located in Redmond, Washington.

I write to share the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities' (NWCCU) support for the students of Alaska and to express my continued concern about the ongoing funding challenges for the state's institutions of higher learning.

NWCCU is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) and accredits 161 institutions of higher education, including the University of Alaska system, in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington by applying evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and success.

Students, the public, state regulatory agencies, such as the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, other higher education institutions, and employers recognize that accredited institutions offer universally accepted degrees and programs. Additionally, students at *only* accredited institutions are eligible for federal funding, i.e., Title IV federal financial aid and federally sponsored grant programs.

Loss of accreditation has had devastating effects for institutions of higher learning across the United States, including: *loss of all federal funding; such as financial aid and federal grant programs; loss of state authorization to operate within a state, or; even closure.*

In my previous correspondence to the members of the Alaska legislature, I shared that the University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Alaska Anchorage, and University of Alaska Southeast, each accredited separately by NWCCU, have been subjected to budget reductions for most of the last decade. Significant additional cuts, reductions, and program closures could pose a material and significant risk to the quality of education provided to the students within those

institutions. If student success and achievement are demonstrably affected, it could potentially jeopardize the accreditation status of these institutions. Students attending such institutions then become ineligible for federal financial aid and grants that, combined with the loss of scholarships from the state of Alaska and the recent downgrading by Moody's Investors Service of the University of Alaska's general-revenue and lease-revenue bonds, could be the death-knell for the institutions and, ultimately, the students.

NWCCU has met with University of Alaska system leadership and other administrators, faculty, and staff over the past month and is maintaining daily communication with the institutions to provide advice and counsel on the impact of potential educational, structural, and programmatic changes in response to the budget situation on students and on institutional accreditation.

NWCCU has noted and commended the improvements in student success measures over the past five years at all Alaska institutions as a result of consolidation, the use of online technology, the sharing of resources, partnerships within and without the system, partnership with the private sector, and the critical care for native people.

The Commission has also previously informed the University of Alaska system institutions they must continue to ensure sufficient funds are invested to improve student learning and assessment and student educational attainment. In light of the continued budget woes, these latter efforts could be potentially compromised, which NWCCU is concerned about.

The institutions of Alaska are critical innovation and economic engines, as well as engines for social mobility and the hope for many to lead a better life for themselves and their families. I write today to share my continued concern over the proposed reduction in funding and urge you and your colleagues to ensure the University of Alaska campuses are provided adequate funding to continue the delivery of high quality public education to the citizens of Alaska.

I wish you the best in your deliberations and efforts to support the University of Alaska system.

Please contact me if you need additional information in this regard.