



August 21, 2019

University of Alaska Board of Regents
PO Box 755300
Fairbanks, AK 99775

Submitted via email

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce firmly believes that Fairbanks should remain the home of the University of Alaska and its leadership. Every region of the state deserves to have access to higher educational opportunities. However, the state's overall economy benefits from anchoring this center of learning in the Interior.

It is as important now as it was during our Constitutional Convention that Alaska has a strong system of higher education. The State's founders saw the wisdom in locating the leadership and flagship campus of the University in Fairbanks. A healthy state economy requires multiple economic hubs. Since its earliest days, the University has been a major economic driver, and has helped Fairbanks to grow into an important economic center for Alaska. Because of its unique position at the edge of the Arctic, UAF is able to attract outside funding to support world-class research in arctic studies, unmanned aircraft systems, natural phenomena such as the aurora borealis, climate change, and national security. These federal and philanthropic dollars will go to universities or organizations outside Alaska if the respected research programs developed at UAF are dismantled.

In these challenging economic times, Alaska needs an educated workforce that can lead us into the next phase of this state's development. The skilled professionals who are developed locally are the people who stay, contribute to our community and economy, and become the future leaders that will continue a legacy of growth and development. Leaving a rural area for education or training often results in those students staying away long term – contributing to the brain drain and reducing rural economic activity. Providing ongoing education and training in Fairbanks allows local working professionals to advance their skills without being forced to move elsewhere.

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Of course, with the reduced size of the newly combined University of Alaska, distance learning will become even more vital to delivery of services throughout the state. Within the University of Alaska, the Fairbanks campus is furthest along in developing these distance learning programs and tools. It is best poised to address the changing needs of the student population.

The Fairbanks Chamber is composed of member organizations who rely heavily on the University of Alaska Fairbanks to educate and train qualified employees, perform the research which makes us successful in a challenging arctic environment, and attract new talent to Interior Alaska. Removing the economic driver of a major university campus and the federal matching funds that amplify its effect would cripple the economy of the Interior and potentially of the whole state. We strongly urge you to reaffirm your commitment to Fairbanks as the flagship campus of the University of Alaska system.

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce represents over 700 business members throughout Interior Alaska. We work to advocate for the best business environment, promote economic strength and growth for Interior Alaska, and to develop the resources and networks enterprising people use to share knowledge.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marisa Sharrah".

Marisa Sharrah
President/CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Dean".

Rebecca Dean
Board Chair

CC: President Jim Johnsen, Chancellor Dan White