

TESTIMONY

Jessica Doty, Director of Student Health Services, UND

HB 1612

March 18, 2025

Dear Chair Lee and Members of the Senate Human Services Committee:

My name is Jessica Doty, and I am the Director of Student Health Services at the University of North Dakota. **I am here today in support of a DO PASS for HB1612.**

Concerns of pilot and air traffic controller mental health has been on the rise. The creation of a North Dakota center for aerospace medicine would expand medical and mental health services for pilots and air traffic controllers in the state of North Dakota. Receiving appropriation will boost this work within the state with the goal of creating a self-sufficient Center.

I want to share with you more about the structural concept of the Center as it relates to advancing aerospace medicine through clinical access, education, and research concepts and their effects on mental health in the aviation community.

Clinical

Today, there is limited access to aerospace medicine specialists in North Dakota to assist pilots through stringent FAA requirements for medical certificates. This often creates a difficult and scary process to navigate when pilots are facing mental health challenges. Currently, fourteen FAA -designated AMEs listed in the state of North Dakota and two have completed additional HIMS AME training. However, we understand there is limited access to these specialized physicians. The access to psychologist and psychiatrists with knowledge and understanding of aerospace medicine is even more rare.

UND has long-standing resources and infrastructure in place to provide aerospace medicine and psychological care beyond the campus community. UND currently has the clinical component of this initiative up and running. UND students have access to Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) physicians and HIMS AME (a specialized AME physician for substance abuse and mental health diagnosis) as well as aviation psychological assessments. Additionally, UND is poised to complete research as it relates to the aerospace medicine industry through a collaborative approach between the School of Medicine and Health Science, College of Aerospace Science, and Department of Psychology and the FAA.

Receiving state funding would allow additional hires of mental health professionals to provide services to individuals outside of the university. Additionally, we would look to support medical doctors from across the state interested in getting trained and certified as an AME or HIMS AME.

Education

The Center would also establish educational programs for medical and behavioral health professionals across the state of North Dakota to become familiar with unique regulatory requirements pilots and controllers face when maintaining their aviation medical certification.

Additionally, partnering with the North Dakota Aviation Association and North Dakota Aeronautics Commission will provide educational opportunities for pilots through increased access to aerospace medicine experts. An example is the popular “Ask-An-AME” panel at recent meetings.

Research

Finally, the Center can increase research opportunities through collaboration with the FAA and other entities to conduct research relevant around aerospace medicine, aviation mental health and

accessing aerospace medicine care with the goal of making long-standing changes.

In Conclusion

The passage of this bill will serve as a springboard to expand the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine, providing the momentum necessary to establish this initiative as a successful, enduring service for North Dakotans and the surrounding region.

Thank you. I stand for questions.

Important Terms:

Aviation Medical Examiner (AME): A FAA-designated medical doctor trained by the FAA to complete medical certification exams for pilots, air traffic controllers, and unmanned aircraft systems.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): a governmental body of the United States with powers to regulate all aspects of civil aviation, as well as over its surrounding international waters.

Human Intervention Motivation Study Aviation Medical Examiner (HIMS AME): A FAA-designated AME who has successfully completed and passed additional training in evaluating pilots for substance- or alcohol-related conditions other mental health conditions.

Medical Certificate: All pilots must complete a medical examination and evaluation of medical history as prior to flying.



UND UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine

Testimony in Support of HB 1612

North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine

Clinical

Expand clinical service to assist pilots/ air traffic controllers from across the state of North Dakota

Utilize the expertise and infrastructure already established at UND

Research


Collaborate with the FAA and other entities to continue to conduct relevant research in the area of Aerospace Medicine and Aviation Mental Health

Focus on our experience and expertise with rural health and delivery of care

Education/ Outreach

Partner with the North Dakota Aviation Association and North Dakota Aeronautics Commission to provide educational opportunities for pilots regarding aviation medical certification

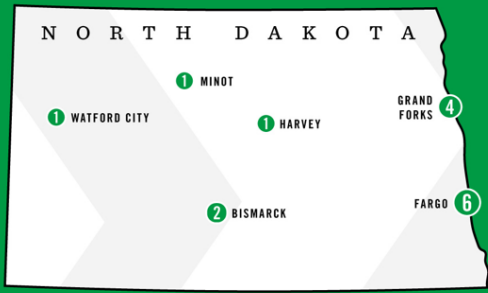
Establish educational programs for medical and behavioral health professionals across the state of North Dakota so they become aware of the needs when caring for pilots



UND UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

Clinical Expansion across North Dakota

AMEs IN NORTH DAKOTA



• Clinical Need

- Declining numbers of Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs) in North Dakota
- Lack of HIMS AMEs in the region
- Healthcare systems do not see value in providing this service (no money to be made)
- Navigating the FAA special issuance medical process is costly, confusing and takes a lot of time.

• Proposed ND Center for Aerospace Medicine:

- Utilize the network of specialists in place at UND to serve the state
- UND SMHS already has clinics in Minot and Bismarck
- Create a network of support