



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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Madam Chair Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services committee, good morning. It is a pleasure to be standing in front of you to introduce House Bill 1612. For the record, my name is Landon Bahl from Grand Forks, I have the pleasure of representing the great citizens of District 17 in the house.

House Bill 1612 stands up the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine. The NDCAM would be housed at The University of North Dakota under the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, and in coordination with the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. This entity will look and feel like the North Dakota Center for Rural Health and would be able to use UND Center for Family Medicine facilities across the state. Think of the NDCAM to have a very similar feeling to the Center for Rural Health. This is also why House Bill 1612 has a one-time appropriation of \$500,000. Subject matter experts firmly believe that once created, this entity will like the ND Center for Rural Health will be both self-funding and have the ability to receive federal grants. In a few short minutes, you will hear testimony from subject matter experts on exactly what this bill will do to aid in mental health issues in the aerospace industry.

The aviation industry is one of the most heavily regulated industries. It is meticulously guarded under the FAA's oversight. Yet, I must say, this relentless guarding has, for decades, resulted in profound and far-reaching negative consequences for countless lives. As a state, we may not have the power to change how the FAA conducts its business, but we *do* have the power to transform the resources and opportunities available to our aviation professionals right here in North Dakota, professionals who underpin an industry we depend on every single day, often without even realizing it. I am happy to share as I am sure others who testify after me will share it too, the news that the FAA is at the table and willing to learn from what the NDCAM will stand to do. Never has the FAA been more at the table, they are looking for North Dakota to lead the way in these efforts.

Chair & Committee, let me briefly share a quick story with you. On October 18, 2021, John Hauser, a talented young pilot, an exceptional student at UND's Aerospace School, and a young fraternity brother of mine, took off in a piper archer aircraft. This, like any other flight a student conducts is a very standard and routine training mission. Tragically, what his family, friends, and fraternity brothers did not know was that John's true mission that evening was a personal one, one that no one knew except for himself. Shortly after takeoff, outside of Grand Forks, ATC lost communication with John as he made the heartbreaking decision to take his own life doing what he so dearly loved. John wrote the following: ***"If there's anything you could do for me, get the FAA to change rules on pilots seeking help with mental health. I know it would change a lot of things for the better, and it would help a lot of people out. Love you, John."*** Those words were in a note written by John Hauser left behind for his parents. John left this earth asking us to fulfill his mission of change in the aviation industry.

I stand before you today not just as an advocate, but as someone who has seen the need for change firsthand. I have experienced the loss of losing not one, but two college fraternity brothers far too soon to suicide. Both were extraordinarily successful, deeply admired by all who knew them, and undoubtedly had bright futures

ahead as commercial aviation pilots. Sam McGuire was only 31 years old, and as you just heard, John Hauser was only 19 years old. Their losses serve as a constant reminder that mental health struggles do not discriminate, they affect even the strongest, the most accomplished, and the most resilient among us.

The pilots I speak of came to our state driven by dreams, passion, and a deep love for the aviation industry. They sought not just a career, but a lifelong journey in the skies, one filled with purpose and promise. Yet, today, we must confront an undeniable truth: the immense pressures imposed by the FAA and the industry, coupled with a lack of accessible resources, have created challenges far too heavy for many to bear.

If those burdens had been decreased, and if the right resources and support systems had been in place, I firmly believe we would not be here mourning the loss of 19-year-old John Hauser, 31-year-old Sam McGuire, and many others who shared those same dreams. Instead, they would still be with us, soaring under those same blue skies they cherished so dearly. Their absence is a call to action, a reminder that we must do better to protect the lives of those who dedicate themselves to the skies and ensure their dreams do not come at the cost of their well-being.

Attached to my testimony are some questions with answers that the House Human Services Committee had which may aid in your committee discussion.

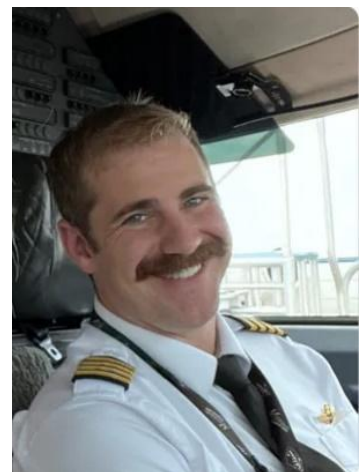
Madam Chair Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services committee, thank you for your time, and I respectfully ask this committee to put your favorable do pass recommendation on House Bill 1612. I will stand for any questions.

Regards,
Landon Bahl



Pictured left is John Hauser, a student at UND in 2021. John took his own life on October 18, 2021 while piloting a UND training plane at the young age of 19 years old. Throughout the testimony here today you will learn much more about John Hauser. John was a tremendous 19-year-old pilot who had the entire world of aviation in front of him. Mental health and the worries of seeking help due to the FAA and how that would play out with his future played a big role in his decision to end his young life. Pictured right is another brother, Sam McGuire, an alumnus of UND, who at the time was working for Southwest Airlines and I believe had just gotten on as a pilot with Delta Airlines. Many would say that Sam had the best

life, new job with one of the best airline carriers, a beautiful girlfriend whom he was soon going to propose to, a house, and some of the best friends that cared deeply about him. What more could you ask for? Unfortunately, deep down, Sam was asking for so much more, but no one knew. The burden of mental health became too much for Sam, and he unfortunately took his own life on August 18, 2023, at the age of 31 years old.



HB 1612

The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine

- **Is UND already doing what this bill plans to do for the entire state?**

Yes, 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 (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.

- **What type of credentials will employees have that are working at the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine?**

Employees will be medical and psychological professionals at UND who already hold the credentials to complete this work. Many of them are hired as UND employees, and a portion of their current work encompasses the aerospace medicine focus already.

The funding received through the state would allow us to hire additional mental health professionals to provide services to individuals outside of the university. We would also look to support medical doctors from across the state interested in getting trained and certified as an AME or HIMS AME.

- What will the \$500,000 appropriation be used for?

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| University of North Dakota | | | |
| ND Center for Aerospace Medicine | | | |
| Period of Performance: 7/1/25-6/30/27 | | | |
| | | | |
| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Total |
| Salary Detail | | | |
| | | | |
| Salary | | | |
| Aviation Psychology Post Doc | 57,000 | 59,280 | 116,280 |
| Master's Level Clinician | 60,000 | 62,400 | 122,400 |
| Experimental Psychology PhD GRA | 25,000 | 25,500 | 50,500 |
| Total Salary | 142,000 | 147,180 | 289,180 |
| | | | |
| Fringe Benefit | 62,680 | 65,182 | 127,862 |
| | | | |
| Total Salary/Fringe | \$204,680 | \$212,362 | \$417,042 |
| | | | |
| Travel for out reach and education | 30,320 | 25,638 | 55,958 |
| Professional Development Training | 15,000 | 12,000 | 27,000 |
| | | | |
| Total Other Direct Costs | \$45,320 | \$37,638 | \$82,958 |
| | | | |
| Total Direct Costs | \$250,000 | \$250,000 | \$500,000 |
| | | | |
| Facilities & Administration (IDC) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |
| Total Budget | \$250,000 | \$250,000 | \$500,000 |

- If the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine gets stood up, how will the execution of this work occur across the state?

Currently, our plan would be to utilize the existing clinic space operated in both Minot and Bismarck as part of the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences, along with our existing clinical space on the UND campus in Grand Forks. Virtual training opportunities may also be a venue to educate the state through professional organizations and medical facilities.

- **How many resources would this center be sharing with UND?**

Most of the resources of this center would be shared with UND. The state dollars would support new hires in the realm of aviation psychology and clinical support so that we can expand those services across the state of North Dakota. The partnership with the School of Medicine and Health Sciences with medical residency clinics in Bismarck, ND and Minot, ND allow greater this Center to expand beyond the Grand Forks campus and serve the entire state.

- **How fast could this center get enacted and actually start seeing patients?**

Pilots and controllers have immediate access to medical providers such as AME's and HIMS AME's. The services and processes currently exist for medical certification physicals, HIMS services, aerospace consults. Access to psychological assessments are available for UND students currently, and could be stood up for non-students quickly.

- **This is a one time \$500,000 appropriation. The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would stand on it's own after getting it started. How certain is the ability to receive federal grants to ensure the center continues across the state well beyond when these initial funds run out?**

The one-time funding would support a kick-start to this Center. The goal would be that increased patient load will provide revenue, research proposals would support the Center as self-sustaining after the initial funds. There would not be federal dollars to support these newly added mental health professionals.

As a reminder, the medical and psychological services provided have fees assessed and paid by the pilots. With the jump start of appropriated funding, the Center have time to build up the client base to support into the future for all pilots within the state.

- **If a pilot shares something with an AME, would the pilot get grounded immediately?**

Yes, pilots are trained to know when to report and self-ground if there are issues. While there may be some delay in hearing from the FAA, pilots hold the ethical obligation to ground themselves in certain situations. There are serious consequences if a pilot withholds information or provides false information to the FAA during the Aviation Medical Certification process. This is the reason why many pilots simply do not seek the healthcare that they may need.

- **With recent plane crashes, will the FAA lower its guidelines?**

These issues with mental health are unrelated to the current crash discussions. The Center of Aerospace Medicine is interested in working with the FAA to learn about how to safely reduce barriers and stigma related to mental health. Determining if a pilot is “fit to fly” is not a black and white answer as the current FAA regulations imply.

- **What the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would do once established, is this happening already within UND?**

Yes, some of this work is currently happening at UND. The Center, with support from the state, would work to expand the reach and knowledge in this area across the state. Some examples may be providing professional development to other medical professionals and psychologists in the state as it relates to aerospace medicine and FAA regulations and processes. Additionally, an example may be providing a support network of AME physicians in all areas of the state to ensure access is wide-spread.

- **The FAA supports the entire mission behind the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine?**

The FAA has been a close partner to UND and is aware of this legislation. They recently visited the UND campus and toured the College of Aerospace and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences. They were overly impressed with what they saw and discussed during their time on the UND campus. UND and North Dakota is uniquely positioned to be impactful players in this conversation and finding solutions to rural access to Aerospace Medicine.

- **Provide detail on the exact services that employees of the Center would provide to pilots?**

The requested funding for the Center would support amplifying the current mental health resources available to pilots across North Dakota. This funding would go in support of hiring additional psychological staff to provide FAA required psychological assessments to pilots, create training opportunities for psychology professionals throughout the state, and enhance research partnerships with the FAA to determine safe and supportive requirements for pilots surrounding mental health concerns.

- **If a pilot has their medical revoked, does the center for aerospace medicine help get pilots back on track to get their medical back as soon as they can? Is this already happening at UND?**

Yes, if a pilot gets their medical certificate “revoked” they would be able to reach out to UND Student Health Service through available HIMS AME services. This support would enhance the ability to have a one-stop-shop for the state with aerospace physicians and psychologists in the same location to support the pilot through the issues they are facing. This is an extraordinarily complex process, so having the expertise available to assist pilots and breakdown the barrier of seeking care is important.