

HB 1612

House Human Services Committee

January 27, 2025

Dr. Laura Morgan, UND Student Health Services

Chair Ruby and Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Laura Morgan, AME, HIMS AME, and I am a physician at Student Health Services (SHS) at the University of North Dakota (UND). I have worked with Dr. Mark Christenson, Medical Director, AME to provide this **support for HB1612** to support broadening and expanding the services available for pilots and air traffic controllers in North Dakota.

Since 1970, SHS has employed physicians designated by the FAA as Aviation Medical Examiners (AME). An AME is a licensed physician, either a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO), who has undergone specialized training to medically certify individuals to safely operate an aircraft. To obtain medical certification, a pilot must complete an online medical history form, which the AME reviews thoroughly. The AME then evaluates the pilot's health, including discussions about any medications the pilot may be taking, to decide if they meet requirements for medical certification. In addition to standard AME training, some AMEs undergo added training to become HIMS AMEs. HIMS (Human Intervention Motivation Study) AMEs specialize in the care and coordination of treatment for individuals with mental health diagnoses and substance abuse issues.

At the SHS, there is a **long-standing tradition of excellence in providing medical certifications for pilots and air traffic controllers.** Since 1970, SHS has been committed to providing AME services to ensure the safety and well-being of aviators through our dedicated and comprehensive care. Many pilots have graduated from UND and continue to return annually for their medical certifications, a testament to the trust and confidence they place in our services.

Pilots face challenges accessing AMEs due to demanding schedules and limited availability. At SHS, we receive hundreds of calls annually from pilots seeking help because they are unable to reach their designated AME. Our nurses and medical staff often provide guidance and education to these individuals, filling a critical gap in resources. This underscores the need for expanded outreach and support within the state.

Currently, **mental health is an increasingly significant concern in the aerospace community,** particularly among pilots and controllers who face unique stressors and challenges in their profession. We have experienced the suicide of a student pilot, John Hauser, on our very campus in 2021. By supporting our efforts, the state legislature would enable us to expand our reach as an aerospace medicine clinic and provide more resources that further promote the safety and success of North Dakota's aviation industry.

Our extensive experience and consistent delivery of high-quality aerospace medical care uniquely positions us to meet the needs of North Dakota's aviation community. We believe in prioritizing quality over quantity and propose the establishment of a Center for Aerospace Medicine to further enhance and expand the services available to pilots in our state.

We recommend a Do Pass for HB 1612 supporting the goal of keeping as many pilots as possible in the air safely, thereby growing North Dakota's thriving aerospace sector. Together, we can ensure that our state stays a leader in aviation while prioritizing the well-being of those who make it possible.

Thank you,

Laura Morgan, MD