

January 26, 2025

3408 Armitage Drive
Charlotte, NC 28269

Testimony of Emmelinne Miller in Favor of HB 1612

To Whom It May Concern,

As a pilot and graduate of the University of North Dakota, I support HB 1612 for the positive impact it will bring to aviators around the country.

On October 18, 2021, UND aviation student John Hauser took his own life on a solo training flight. The fear of losing his medical and flying career was discussed in letters left to family. To obtain an FAA medical certificate as a pilot or air traffic controller, a person must be physically and mentally fit. When an applicant's health condition is outside of the standard requirements, the Federal Air Surgeon has the authority to grant a "Special Issuance" medical. Historically, pilots want to fly and may ignore illnesses to obtain and maintain a medical certificate. Whenever the program of medical issuance burdens pilots, they may seek alternative methods of health care or avoid it completely. Aviation professionals already face enormous pressures - untreated mental conditions and the fear of a denied medical only add more stress to the profession.

The standards the FAA uses to declare someone mentally fit do not align with modern medicine. For example, seeking talk therapy for an acute stressor of life (i.e., death of a family member) can subject a pilot to the burdens of the special issuance process. The FAA cites a lack of data as to why they have not modernized their mental health standards. The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine proposed in HB 1612 would directly address this problem, facilitating the research needed to remove barriers to mental healthcare for pilots nationwide.

Current burdens of special issuance applicants:

- FAA is 8+ months delayed in reviewing applicants' cases
- Expenses of testing, additional doctor visits, and paperwork are the pilot's burden
- Downtime from a professional position creates significant loss of income
- Discontinued training of student pilots or professional track programs can delay graduation or impact training progress

Hoffman, et al., 2019:

- 75% of pilots reported feeling "worried about seeking medical care"
- 60% of pilots reported delaying or not seeking medical care out of concern for their flying status
- 38% of pilots "admitted to withholding information from their physicians"

The current flaws in the FAA's medical standards have been shown to deter aviators from seeking the mental healthcare they need. Establishing the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine will greatly benefit the aviation industry and exemplify UND's continued leadership in the aerospace field. Overall, the impact of HB 1612 will lead to a safer national aviation system for pilots and passengers alike.

Thank you for your consideration.