

Connor Ferguson | UND Student Body President
connor.ferguson@und.edu | 612.454.8288

House Bill 1612
Human Services Committee
January 17th, 2025

Chairman Ruby and Members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee,

My name is Connor Ferguson, and I serve as the Student Body President at the University of North Dakota (UND). I am submitting testimony in favor of HB 1612, relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine.

The passage of HB 1612 will undoubtedly have a positive impact on aviation students at the University of North Dakota. For aviation students, an examination conducted by an Aviation Medical Examiner is a requirement for them to fly. Until they receive their medical certification, they will be grounded and unable to continue their flight course. For some students, the availability of care is lacking in the Upper Midwest, and the medical certification can be a barrier to entry for many prospective student pilots. The establishment of a center for aerospace medicine at the University of North Dakota will help resolve the lack of accessibility to care and ease the process of becoming a pilot. This center can ensure that UND's flight students can receive their certification in a timely and cost-effective manner while keeping the University of North Dakota at the cutting edge of aerospace and aviation research.

One of the greatest benefits that HB 1612 can provide is its ability to respond to the growing issue of mental health in aviation. Because of the delicate and secure nature of aviation, pilots can be grounded because of mental or physical health issues. This has resulted in 54% of pilots in the United States and Canada to take part in health care avoidance¹ so that their flight status would not be in jeopardy. These instances of health care avoidance can lead to devastating outcomes for pilots including self-harm, suicide and suicidal ideations, lack of preventative

¹ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/its-time-to-act-on-pilots-mental-health/>

healthcare, and overall poorer health outcomes. The status quo harms the quality of life for pilots, as well as potentially endangering the lives of passengers. At the University of North Dakota, we have seen firsthand the effects of health care avoidance as it has manifested in the loss of student pilots to suicide because of a lack of discrete mental health support.

By establishing a center for aerospace medicine at the University of North Dakota, we can serve our students and work towards bettering the lives of pilots everywhere. This center can establish a culture of openness and support at the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, and the work they do can assist the FAA in resolving the epidemic of pilot mental health issues.

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee, I respectfully request a Do Pass recommendation on HB 1612. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Connor Ferguson