

## TESTIMONY

**Jessica Doty, Director of Student Health Services, UND**

**HB 1612**

**January 27, 2025**

Dear Chair Ruby and Members of the House 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. As evidenced by the work already available at UND for student pilots, the Center would increase access to clinical, research, education, and outreach opportunities within the state. Receiving appropriation will provide a boost in broadening and enhancing this work within the state with the goal of creating a self-sufficient Center.

I want to share with you more about the 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 are 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.

For example, UND Student Health Services (SHS) has upheld a busy AME practice since 1970 with 2-3 specially trained AME physicians and a HIMS AME. These providers complete nearly 1,000 aviation medical exams annually. In the past year, SHS has received over one hundred phone calls from pilots with questions about their certificate and have had over fifty visits from pilots wanting to meet with an AME regarding with FAA medical certificate. The UND School of Medicine has medical clinics in every quadrant of the state creating an opportunity to collaborate and develop support networks for AME providers. Additionally, UND Counseling Center staffs a neuropsychologist and psychologists specially trained in aerospace assessments required for certain mental health conditions. This foundation poises UND to expand these specialized clinical services.

## **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.



# 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

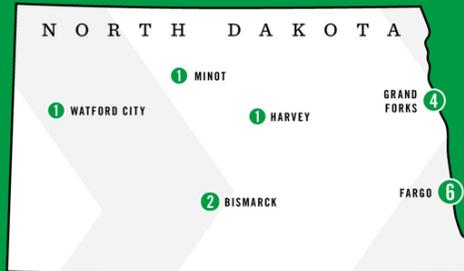
Partner with the North Dakota Aviation Association and North Dakota Aeronautics Commission to provide educational opportunities for pilots regarding aviation medical certification

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



# 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