

I am writing to express my support for HB 1612, which proposes the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine. I currently teach at the University of North Dakota Aerospace School, but my background is in Emergency Medicine.

When I first joined the college, I was unaware of the rigorous testing requirements for pilots. The FAA mandates that pilots undergo a medical exam at least once a year, and this frequency may increase based on their age or medical concerns. North Dakota has a significant need for this facility due to the region's shortage of Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs). Not only will it assist our students at UND in obtaining their FAA medical certificates more easily, but it will also benefit pilots in the surrounding areas.

Additionally, mental health issues have been on the rise in recent years. If a pilot reports mental health concerns during their FAA medical examination, they risk having their certification revoked. Consequently, many individuals with mental health problems avoid seeking treatment, fearing it could jeopardize their careers. This facility could help reduce that stigma and provide support for those in need. Often, individuals dealing with significant stressors who do not seek care may turn to drugs and alcohol as a means of self-medication, which can worsen their mental health issues.

Thank you for your attention, and I urge all of you to support this bill to help maintain North Dakota as a leader in the aerospace industry.