



March 18th, 2025

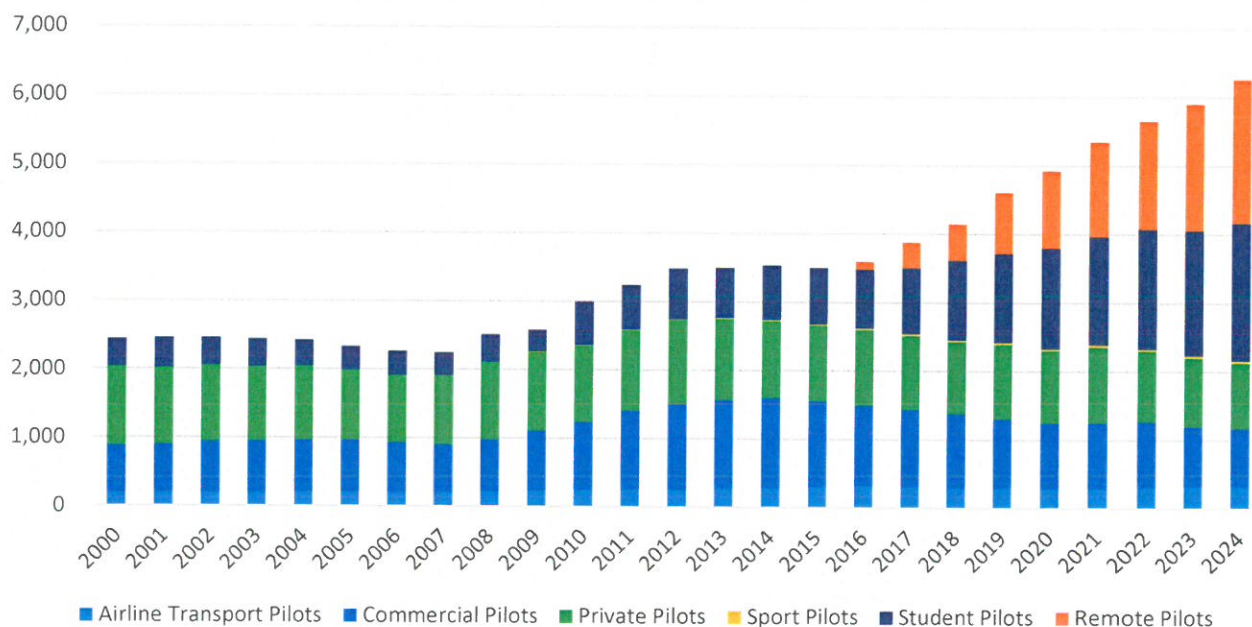
RE: Testimony to the Senate Human Services Committee – HB 1612

Chair Lee and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the North Dakota Aeronautics Commission, I am submitting this testimony in strong support of House Bill No. 1612, which seeks to establish the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine at the University of North Dakota. This initiative represents a strategic investment in the future of our state's aviation industry and will provide significant benefits to North Dakota's rapidly growing aviation community.

Over the past decade, North Dakota's aviation industry has experienced tremendous growth. In 2024, the state recorded an all-time high in airline passenger numbers and treated a record 5.5 million acres with aerial applicators. Additionally, North Dakota is experiencing near-record levels of based aircraft and a substantial increase in air cargo demand, driven by consumer expectations for expedited package delivery. The state also boasts a record number of pilots, largely due to the exceptional flight training program at the University of North Dakota and the growing number of remote pilots operating uncrewed aerial systems. A graphic illustrating the increasing number of pilots in North Dakota is included within this testimony for visual reference.

Active Pilots in North Dakota



Data retrieved from - https://www.faa.gov/data_research/aviation_data_statistics/civil_airmen_statistics

This growing industry needs a workforce—but it also needs a healthy workforce with high standards and good access to healthcare professionals. Ensuring that our aviators have the support they need to address any healthcare-related issues is essential to maintaining the safety and reliability of the critical services our communities depend on.

Aerospace medicine is critical to ensuring the health and safety of pilots, flight students, and aviation professionals throughout the state. A flight physical is required to exercise the privileges of most pilot certificates, including certain UAS operations. However, access to an Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) remains limited in our rural state, often requiring individuals to travel long distances. For those with special medical considerations, such as individuals previously treated for conditions like depression, consultation with a HIMS AME is required. This often necessitates travel outside the state, creating significant barriers that may discourage individuals from pursuing or continuing careers in aviation.

The lack of accessible aerospace medical services contributes to the industry's labor shortage. House Bill No. 1612 addresses this challenge by establishing the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine, which will:

Enhance Aviation Safety and Workforce Development:

- The FAA special issuance medical process is often costly, complex, and time-consuming. The proposed center will provide essential support to individuals navigating this process, reducing delays and financial burdens.
- Access to qualified medical certification services is crucial for pilots and aviation professionals to maintain compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations. The center will assist individuals in meeting these requirements, fostering career development and enhancing safety standards across the industry.

Expand Rural Access to Aviation Medical Services:

- North Dakota's rural communities face significant challenges in accessing specialized aviation medical services, including Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs). The center will help bridge this gap by expanding access to AMEs and Human Intervention Motivational Study (HIMS) aviation medical examiners.
- Additionally, the center will facilitate outreach by enabling qualified physicians to provide critical medical services throughout the state, ensuring that rural aviators have the necessary resources to sustain their careers.

Promote Research and Innovation:

- The center will foster collaboration across various research initiatives related to aviation medicine, positioning North Dakota as a national leader in this field.
- By leveraging the unique resources and expertise available at the University of North Dakota, the center will address statewide challenges while attracting talent and funding to advance aerospace medicine research and innovation.

Support Economic Growth and Aviation Industry Expansion:

- With the increasing demand for commercial aviation, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and air traffic control professionals, the center will provide critical support to North Dakota's growing aviation sector.
- This initiative will contribute to economic development and job creation, further solidifying North Dakota's reputation as a leader in the aviation industry.

Education and Outreach Initiatives:

- The center will serve as a valuable resource for education and outreach, offering vital information to flight students, aviation professionals, and the broader public.
- By promoting awareness of aerospace medicine, regulatory compliance, and best health practices, the center will enhance the overall well-being and preparedness of North Dakota's aviation workforce.

The establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine is a forward-thinking initiative that will significantly benefit our state's aviation sector by ensuring the safety, health, and professional development of aviation personnel.

I respectfully request the committee to support House Bill No. 1612 to address the aviation industry's challenges and reinforce North Dakota's leadership in aviation excellence.

Respectfully,



Kyle C. Wanner
Executive Director
ND Aeronautics Commission