

2025 HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES

HB 1612

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Pioneer Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
1/27/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine; and to provide an appropriation.

2:30 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman M. Ruby, Vice-Chairman Frelich, Representatives Anderson, Beltz, Bolinske, Davis, Dobervich, Fegley, Hendrix, Holle, Kiefert, Rios, Rohr

Discussion Topics:

- Mental health for aviation professionals.

2:31 p.m. Representative Bahl, District 17, testified in favor and submitted testimony, #31623.

2:48 p.m. Jacob Rabon, Alumni of Delta Tau Delta Fraternity, testified in favor and submitted testimony, #31466.

2:53 p.m. Christopher Anderson, Alumni of Delta Tau Delta Fraternity, testified in favor and submitted testimony, #31603.

2:59 p.m. Elizabeth Bjerke, Associate Dean in the College of Aerospace and Professor of Aviation at the University of North Dakota, testified in favor and submitted testimony, #31715.

3:16 p.m. Jessica Doty, Director of Student Health Services of University of North Dakota, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #31725.

3:29 p.m. Kyle Wanner, Executive Director of the North Dakota Aeronautics Commission, testified in favor and submitted testimony, #31797.

Additional written testimony:

Johnathan Emerson, Delta Air Lines Pilot, submitted testimony in favor, #31262.

Quinten Gjerde, alumni of Delta Tau Delta, submitted testimony in favor, #31264.

Sky Overbo submitted testimony in favor, #31322.

Erin Roesler submitted testimony in favor, #31398.

Jacquelyn Emery submitted testimony in favor, #31407.

Ethan Harsell submitted testimony in favor, #31421.

Laura Morgan, Physician, AME, HIMS AME of UND Student Health Services, submitted testimony in favor, #31425.

Lauren Stornelli submitted testimony in favor, #31432.

Jacob Castellano submitted testimony in favor, #31439.

Neil Kotzenmacher, Student Pilot at UND, submitted testimony in favor, #31453.

Joelle Ruthig submitted testimony in favor, #31475.

Anne Suh submitted testimony in favor, #31497.

Henry Rott, Assistant Chapter Advisor of Risk Education of Delta Tau Delta, submitted testimony in favor, #31538.

Emmeline Miller, Pilot, UND Graduate, submitted testimony in favor, #31545.

Amy Diede, Physician, submitted testimony in favor, #31596.

Peter Richards, Delta Tau Delta, submitted testimony in favor, #31629.

Robert Muhs submitted testimony in favor, #31637.

Danny Mantooth, Director of Media for Pilot Mental Health Campaign, submitted testimony in favor, #31640.

Natalie Odier submitted testimony in favor, #31649.

Lamar Murchison submitted testimony in favor, #31663.

Thomas Zeidlik, UND Aerospace, submitted testimony in favor, #31688.

Jennifer Watne, Aerospace Physiologist of the University Of North Dakota School John D Odegard of Aerospace Sciences, submitted testimony in favor, #31719.

Jack Muhs, Retired Airline Executive and UND Alumni, submitted testimony in favor, #31742.

Alyssa Gaetz, UND Aerospace, submitted testimony in favor, #31778.

Johnathan Rodriguez submitted testimony in favor, #31779.

Majorie Jenkins, Vice President for Health Affairs and Dean of the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, submitted testimony in favor, #31780.

Tanner Overland, Chairman of the North Dakota Aviation Association, submitted testimony in favor, #31816.

Connor Ferguson, Student Body President of the UND Student Government, submitted testimony in favor, #31847.

Tajae Viaene, Director of Flight School Operations of the Fargo Jet Center, submitted testimony in favor, #31860.

Mark Larsen submitted testimony in favor, #31868.

Samuel Schwartz, Senior Aviation Student at University of North Dakota, submitted testimony in favor, #31877.

3:33 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby closed the hearing.

Jackson Toman, Committee Clerk

ND State Testimony

Hello, my name is Jon Emerson and I am a pilot at Delta Air Lines. I am an alumni of the University of North Dakota. The passing of this bill is paramount for the health and safety of aviation professionals. As a professional myself I understand the "I can do it" attitude that we all have. We never want to admit if we are battling something and especially when it comes to mental health. When it comes to our job security it requires pilots to pass regular medical exams to be able to keep flying. This can create some distrust between pilots and doctors. One bad remark and suddenly your shining pilot career could be over. Unfortunately in aviation history we have seen several instances where mental health has overcame the life of pilots. In 2013 there was an Air Mozambique flight 470 where a pilot took his life by crashing. In 2015 Germanwings flight 9525 had the same result. Locally in North Dakota we have seen where mental health has affected pilots both in and out of aircraft. In the 90's North Dakota had a flight instructor who took their life in an aircraft. In 2021 a student took their life in an aircraft. And in 2023 a UND alumni took their life. What those 3 pilots had in common is that they all had very promising pilot careers. Have they had the proper mental health resources in place for aviation professionals then maybe we would still have these individuals with us today. So please consider this bill because even one life lost is too many.

Quinten Gjerde

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Apt 220, South Saint Paul, MN
55075
(701)-520-9256
qugjer@gmail.com

January 24th, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1612. The tragic and unnecessary losses of John Hauser and Sam McGuire highlight the urgent need for this legislation.

Pilots face extraordinary mental and physical stresses that are unlike those experienced by most individuals in their daily lives. It is imperative that they have access to the proper mental health and wellness resources to navigate these challenges effectively.

I believe this bill is a crucial step toward providing these highly skilled professionals with the support they need, ultimately helping to prevent future tragedies. Pilots are one of our nation's most valuable assets, and ensuring their well-being is not only a matter of safety but also one of compassion for their families and loved ones. Everyone should have confidence that their family members and friends will return home safely at the end of the day.

Thank you for considering this important measure.

Best regards,

Quinten Gjerde

Dear Members of the North Dakota Legislative Assembly,

I am writing to express **my strong support** for House Bill 1612, which proposes the allocation of \$2 million to establish a Center for Aerospace Medicine in North Dakota. This initiative represents a forward-thinking investment in the well-being and success of aviation personnel, a cornerstone of our state's thriving aviation industry.

Aerospace professionals, including pilots, air traffic controllers, maintenance technicians, and support staff, operate in high-stakes environments where physical and mental health are paramount to safety and performance. Despite the critical nature of their roles, many **aviation personnel face significant barriers** to accessing specialized healthcare tailored to their unique needs. **Nationwide, approximately 60% of aviation professionals report difficulty finding healthcare providers who understand the unique demands of their profession** (Smith & Brown, 2021), and in **North Dakota, over 70% of rural counties are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)** (National Rural Health Association, 2020). North Dakota, in particular, faces a shortage of healthcare providers with expertise in aerospace medicine and mental health care. **Until very recently, no aviation psychologists were located within the state**, forcing aviators to travel across the United States for specialized care. This lack of local providers often forces individuals to travel long distances or delay care, exacerbating health challenges, increasing costs, and potentially compromising safety.

The proposed center would address this gap by providing accessible, comprehensive care, ensuring that these individuals can perform their duties safely and effectively. **Many aviation professionals are hesitant to seek mental health care due to the fear of losing their medical certificates**, a requirement to continue working in their field. This fear, as highlighted by Hoffman et.al. (2022), often leads to untreated mental health conditions that can escalate and impact performance. **By centralizing resources and expertise, the center would provide access to well-trained mental health professionals who understand these unique challenges and can offer confidential, specialized care.**

Studies show that mental health issues in aviation are a growing concern, with approximately **56% of pilots reporting significant levels of depression and nearly 12% experiencing suicidal ideation** prior to the mental health impacts of COVID (Taylor et al., 2016).

Additionally, studies indicate that **25% of air traffic controllers experience symptoms of anxiety** (Jones & Carter, 2019), and **fatigue-related incidents contribute to nearly 20% of aviation safety reports** (Federal Aviation Administration, 2020). These statistics underscore the urgent need for specialized mental health services tailored to the aviation community.

North Dakota is home to a growing aviation sector, driven by institutions such as the University of North Dakota's John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences and a robust commercial and general aviation community. **By establishing a Center for Aerospace Medicine, we would not only support the health and resilience of our aviation workforce but also position North Dakota as a leader in aerospace medicine and innovation.** This initiative would enhance our

ability to attract and retain top talent in the industry, further bolstering our state's economic growth.

Moreover, the **center would provide vital resources to address the mental health challenges faced by aviation personnel.** The unique stressors of aviation careers—including irregular schedules, high responsibility, and the need for constant vigilance—can take a toll on mental health. By offering specialized mental health services, the center would promote well-being and reduce stigma, **creating a culture where seeking help is viewed as a strength rather than a vulnerability.**

Investing in the Center for Aerospace Medicine through HB 1612 is an investment in the safety, health, and future of North Dakota's aviation community. I urge you to support this important legislation and ensure that our state continues to lead in advancing the well-being of those who keep our skies safe.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your commitment to the advancement of North Dakota's aviation industry. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can provide additional information or assistance.

Sincerely,
Dr. Sky Overbo, Licensed HIMS Psychologist
Sky.overbo@und.edu

TESTIMONY OF
ERIN ROESLER
NORTH DAKOTA CITIZEN & PILOT
JANUARY 25, 2025
HOUSE BILL NO. 1612

As a committed citizen of North Dakota and a passionate pilot, I stand before you to advocate for the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine, as proposed in House Bill No. 1612. Beyond the technical and physical demands of aviation, pilots face significant mental health challenges that often remain unspoken due to stigma and fear of professional repercussions. Sharing real-life stories underscores the critical need for dedicated support systems in our state.

The Silent Struggles of Pilots

Pilots, whether seasoned professionals or aspiring students, often face immense pressures that can impact their mental health. One tragic example that deeply resonates **within our own community** is the story of John Hauser, a University of North Dakota student pilot. In 2021, John lost his life to suicide, a devastating reminder of the silent struggles many in the aviation community endure. John's passing brought national attention to the mental health challenges facing student pilots, highlighting the urgent need for increased awareness, resources, and support systems that prioritize well-being without fear of jeopardizing one's career aspirations.

In October 2023, Joseph Emerson, an experienced Alaska Airlines pilot, faced a severe mental health crisis. While off-duty and traveling as a passenger, Emerson attempted to shut down the plane's engines mid-flight. He later revealed that he had been battling depression and, in an attempt to self-medicate, consumed psychedelic mushrooms, leading to a breakdown. Emerson's case highlights the profound mental health challenges pilots can face and the potential consequences when these issues remain unaddressed.

Similarly, in 2012, JetBlue Flight 191 experienced a harrowing incident when Captain Clayton Osbon suffered a mental breakdown during flight. Exhibiting erratic behavior and incoherent speech, he was subdued by passengers and crew after leaving the cockpit. This event underscores the unpredictable nature of mental health crises and the importance of proactive mental health support for pilots.

Barriers to Seeking Help

A significant barrier preventing pilots from seeking mental health support is the fear of jeopardizing their careers. The stringent regulations surrounding medical certification often discourage open discussions about mental well-being. Pilots worry that disclosing mental health struggles or seeking treatment could lead to suspension or loss of their flying privileges. This

fear fosters a culture of silence, where many choose to suffer in isolation rather than risk their livelihoods.

The Role of the Proposed Center

The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine can play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by:

- **Providing Confidential Support:** Offering a safe environment where pilots can seek mental health assistance without fear of professional consequences.
- **Advocating for Policy Reform:** Working with regulatory bodies to develop balanced policies that prioritize both safety and the well-being of aviation professionals.
- **Promoting Mental Health Awareness:** Educating the aviation community about the importance of mental health and reducing the associated stigma.

Conclusion

The mental health challenges faced by pilots are profound and multifaceted. Establishing the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine is not just an investment in the health of our aviation professionals but also a commitment to the safety of all who rely on air travel. This initiative will further solidify the University of North Dakota as the premier educational institute for aerospace sciences. It represents an opportunity to drive meaningful change in the aviation industry by fostering a culture that prioritizes health and well-being. Moreover, the center will play a vital role in supporting the next generation of aviation professionals—our students—as they embark on their aerospace career paths, equipping them with the resources and resilience needed for long-term success in this demanding field.

I urge you to support House Bill No. 1612 and take a decisive step toward addressing this critical issue.

Thank you for your consideration.

To the Legislative Assembly of North Dakota,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1612 regarding a North Dakota center for aerospace medicine. As an alumni of UND, this program would have been substantially beneficial for the students of UND and the North Dakota community. This industry requires safety to be on the forefront of all decisions, and that includes the health of those in the industry. The University of North Dakota has been a leader in mental health awareness within the aerospace industry including the Mental Health Summit and peer-to-peer support resource program. By enacting this program, UND will continue to lead the industry in awareness and research. During my time at UND, I watched other aviation students struggle with mental health issues without resources and suicide. This is an epidemic that is affecting young adults everywhere, especially those within this industry. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Emery

Horizon Air First Officer and 2022 UND Alumni

(303)-242-0128

Jmemery31@gmail.com

I am writing in strong support of House Bill No. 1612. This legislation is a crucial step toward addressing the urgent need for improved mental health and medical resources for pilots.

John Hauser's last request was simple yet profound: "If you can do anything for me, try to change the FAA rules so that other young pilots don't have to go through what I went through." His words serve as a call to action. No pilot should feel trapped, and no family should have to suffer an avoidable loss. This bill would provide vital support to ensure that pilots have access to the mental health and medical resources they need to continue flying safely.

Pilots endure immense mental and physical stresses that few other professions experience. Ensuring they have proper support is not just a matter of safety—it is also an act of compassion for their families and loved ones. House Bill No. 1612 will enhance access to medical certification assistance, streamline aviation medical processes, and strengthen research in aerospace medicine. Additionally, the \$2 million appropriation for this initiative will create jobs, attract top-tier aviation medical professionals to North Dakota, and expand educational opportunities in this field.

I urge this committee to consider a do pass recommendation to the house floor to safeguard the health and safety of aviation professionals.

Thank You,

Ethan Harsell

District 43

HB 1612

House Human Services Committee

January 27, 2025

Dr. Laura Morgan, UND Student Health Services

Chair Ruby and Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Laura Morgan, AME, HIMS AME, and I am a physician at Student Health Services (SHS) at the University of North Dakota (UND). I have worked with Dr. Mark Christenson, Medical Director, AME to provide this **support for HB1612** to support broadening and expanding the services available for pilots and air traffic controllers in North Dakota.

Since 1970, SHS has employed physicians designated by the FAA as Aviation Medical Examiners (AME). An AME is a licensed physician, either a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO), who has undergone specialized training to medically certify individuals to safely operate an aircraft. To obtain medical certification, a pilot must complete an online medical history form, which the AME reviews thoroughly. The AME then evaluates the pilot's health, including discussions about any medications the pilot may be taking, to decide if they meet requirements for medical certification. In addition to standard AME training, some AMEs undergo added training to become HIMS AMEs. HIMS (Human Intervention Motivation Study) AMEs specialize in the care and coordination of treatment for individuals with mental health diagnoses and substance abuse issues.

At the SHS, there is a **long-standing tradition of excellence in providing medical certifications for pilots and air traffic controllers.** Since 1970, SHS has been committed to providing AME services to ensure the safety and well-being of aviators through our dedicated and comprehensive care. Many pilots have graduated from UND and continue to return annually for their medical certifications, a testament to the trust and confidence they place in our services.

Pilots face challenges accessing AMEs due to demanding schedules and limited availability. At SHS, we receive hundreds of calls annually from pilots seeking help because they are unable to reach their designated AME. Our nurses and medical staff often provide guidance and education to these individuals, filling a critical gap in resources. This underscores the need for expanded outreach and support within the state.

Currently, **mental health is an increasingly significant concern in the aerospace community,** particularly among pilots and controllers who face unique stressors and challenges in their profession. We have experienced the suicide of a student pilot, John Hauser, on our very campus in 2021. By supporting our efforts, the state legislature would enable us to expand our reach as an aerospace medicine clinic and provide more resources that further promote the safety and success of North Dakota's aviation industry.

Our extensive experience and consistent delivery of high-quality aerospace medical care uniquely positions us to meet the needs of North Dakota's aviation community. We believe in prioritizing quality over quantity and propose the establishment of a Center for Aerospace Medicine to further enhance and expand the services available to pilots in our state.

We recommend a Do Pass for HB 1612 supporting the goal of keeping as many pilots as possible in the air safely, thereby growing North Dakota's thriving aerospace sector. Together, we can ensure that our state stays a leader in aviation while prioritizing the well-being of those who make it possible.

Thank you,

Laura Morgan, MD

As a psychologist, I want to emphasize the critical need for mental healthcare access and destigmatization within the aviation community. Pilots face unique stressors and challenges that can impact their mental health, but the fear of losing their ability to fly often serves as a significant barrier to seeking care. This fear creates a culture of avoidance, where aviators may suppress their struggles rather than addressing them openly.

Through my work on pilot healthcare-seeking behavior project where I conducted interviews with student pilots, it has become clear that the stigma surrounding mental health in aviation must be addressed. Many aspiring pilots are hesitant to access healthcare services because of the potential repercussions, such as license restrictions or career limitations. This creates an environment where mental health concerns can go unaddressed, putting both the pilots and those who depend on their expertise at risk.

To safeguard the wellbeing of pilots and the broader aviation community, we must work to eliminate barriers to mental healthcare. Pilots, including students, need access to confidential and supportive healthcare services that will not jeopardize their ability to fly. Reducing stigma and creating policies that prioritize mental health without punitive measures is essential to ensuring a healthier, safer aviation industry.

My name is Jacob Castellano, I am a student at the University of North Dakota, and an active member of Delta Tau Delta Fraternity. I am writing in support of HB 1612. Pilots manage mental stress that is different to most professions, and a bill that prioritizes their mental health and safety would help immensely for people, like John Hauser, who may need help. Pilots have also declined help when they needed it, out of fear of losing their medical and their ability to fly. This bill would considerably lighten the load on future pilots and help to prevent tragedies from happening again. I urge this committee to give this bill a do pass recommendation.

Sincerely,

Jacob Castellano

Honorable Members of the North Dakota Legislative Assembly,

Hello, my name is Neil Kotzenmacher, and I am a senior at the University of North Dakota majoring in Commercial Aviation and Aviation Management. As a private pilot currently pursuing my commercial rating, I have personally experienced the challenges of navigating the FAA's medical certification process. After being diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, it took me over a year and a half to secure a special issuance medical certificate. The process was financially burdensome, with repeated visits to aviation medical examiners and extensive testing, and emotionally taxing due to the uncertainty of my career prospects.

This bill is critical to improving access to resources and support for aviation professionals. Mental health challenges are particularly difficult to address in this field due to the stigma and fear of losing medical certification, which can lead pilots to hide their struggles. The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would provide much-needed assistance with FAA medical certification, access to aviation medical examiners, and outreach focused on mental health.

By passing this bill, we can take a significant step toward protecting the health and careers of aviation professionals while reducing barriers to accessing the resources they need. I urge you to support this essential initiative.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Neil Kotzenmacher

Mr. Chairman and committee members thank you for allowing me to testify in front of you today in support of House Bill 1612. My name is Jacob Rabon. I am a resident of District 17 in Grand Forks and I recently graduated from the University of North Dakota with a Bachelor's degree in operations & supply chain management. I am currently serving in the Minnesota Army National Guard as a Unit supply specialist (92Y) and on the civilian side, I work in global supply chain. You might be asking yourself why is a young man who has made his career in logistics testifying before for us today about a mental health in aviation bill? My answer would be, because I lived it. I lived the consequences of society not taking mental health in aviation seriously.

On October 18th, 2021 I received news that would change the lives of many at the University of North Dakota. During this time I was the President of Delta Tau Delta Fraternity and at first, it seemed to be a normal Monday with lots of class and meetings. Early into the night, I received a phone call from my vice president saying that the police were at one of our members' homes and that the airport was shut down. Not being an aviation student I didn't understand the connection between the airport shutting down and police being at our member's home. My vice president went on to tell me that the Grand Forks airport rarely shuts down and it is closed because of a plane crash and that the police were at our member's home because they believed that he was flying the aircraft when it crashed. I asked him if this must be some horrible accident. Do you have any more information? He responded with "Jake the last speed clocked by the plane was 156 Knots and the only way you can reach that speed in a single engine piper archer aircraft is in a nose dive". I took a deep breath and paused, then told my vice president to gather everyone at the fraternity house so we could relay the news. Fifteen minutes later we

walked into a full house of 80 active members, alumni, and staff laughing as if the day was normal. Minutes later, I regrettably had to share the news that brother, John Hauser passed away, and tragically took his own life in a UND training plane. It was at that time, the room of laughter turned into tears and happiness turned into grief.

John Hauser was a good young man, an outstanding student, and a great friend and brother. We all wondered why John, who always had a smile and was living his best life, would do something like this. He never shared his true feelings about his mental health with anyone. Later we realized that John was trying to send a message to our community to take mental health seriously and that he'd rather die than not pursue his dream of being a pilot.

After all the vigils, funerals, and grief my fraternity and I knew that a change needed to be made in the aviation industry so a situation like John's would never happen again. A change that would allow pilots struggling with mental health to have the opportunity to talk with others about their feelings without fear of retaliation because we are all people and no man or woman is perfect. So I'll restate a question you might have had earlier in my testimony: "Why is a young man who has made his career in logistics testifying before us today about a mental health aviation bill?" The reason being because we have a war going on against the mental health of pilots and air traffic controllers, and other aviation related professionals, and the state of North Dakota has the opportunity right now to lead the way and be the tip of the spear in resolving this conflict. We have the opportunity to say to pilots and other aviation professionals all around the world not only should you come to The University of North Dakota to become one of the best pilots or air traffic controller in the world but also that the state of North Dakota cares about you, will fight for you, and will stand next to you when times get hard. House bill 1612 has the opportunity to take the first step in giving more resources our pilots, air traffic controllers and

others throughout the state of North Dakota. This will establish a precedent that the university of North Dakota and our state take this matter seriously and are working to make it better. What You heard today is simply one of many stories that I have relating to aviation mental health. So Today I ask you to support House Bill 1612, and give it a favorable do pass out of committee. Thank you again Mr. Chairman and the members of the Human Services committee for your time. I will happily answer any questions you may have.

Conducting health psychology research for nearly two decades and collaborative research initiatives with Dr. Elizabeth Bjerke on pilot health care seeking behavior, has provided me with a greater understanding of the barriers to effectively seeking care and managing mental health among pilots. Specifically, through semi-structured interviews with both civilian and military pilot trainees, we identified barriers to receiving care that exist in early training stages. Pilot trainees report fear of disclosing symptoms, lack of health literacy, and delaying treatment seeking until symptoms become unmanageable as examples of barriers to seeking care. Due to the clear benefits of receiving mental and physical health care as early as possible, a Center for Aerospace Medicine with the capacity to serve pilots across the state of North Dakota would be a tremendous asset to ensuring optimal mental health in our aviators.

Joelle Ruthig, PhD

Grand Forks Resident

TESTIMONY**ANNE HAUSER****January 27, 2025****IN SUPPORT OF A DO PASS
HOUSE BILL 1612**

Dear Chair Ruby and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

Our son passed away on October 18, 2021 by taking his life.

John, a beloved son and younger brother, was a sophomore at UND majoring in commercial aviation and was a strong student. He was responsible, compassionate, motivated, and had maturity beyond his 19 years. His paternal roots, rural Minnesotan farmers, engrained in him a determined and hard-working nature. Raised in Chicago, John earned his private pilot's license in 2020 and paid for the \$10,000 license himself through working different jobs from the age of 14. John continued to work part time jobs while at UND, contributing to the cost of flight lessons. He was interested in aviation since the age of about 10, and his love of flying continued as he decided to pursue his passion for aviation as a career.

Although we did not know it, John was suffering from what we assume to be depression. We discovered this from the letters he left us and his older sister Grace. Although he met many friends in the aviation program and his UND fraternity, Delta Tau Delta, he described feelings of sadness for which he wanted to get help, but did not feel he could because of concerns of losing his medical certificate and being grounded. He described it as if he were trapped between *"wanting to feel better and losing his license to fly which he loved."* Reading his words broke our hearts.

As we know from national studies, the mental health of young adults (18-25 yrs) has suffered, especially during the pandemic. Per the research, in what Acting Deputy Dr. Debra Houry said was a cry for help, *44% of teens said they felt sad or hopeless and nearly 20% said they had seriously considered suicide.* (Talal Ansari, WSJ March 31, 2022) To think that college aviation students would be excluded from this pool of concerning statistics would be a great mistake.

After our son John's death, we heard from working pilots and from aviation students that this is a problem within the profession. For several reasons pilots and those working in aviation may be at *higher* risk of mental health illnesses—the hours they work, the stressful work environment, increasing demand for travel, furlough risks and the steep cost/debt of becoming a pilot. Students even informed us they are advised by those in the profession *not* to seek counseling as they will then contend with strict and negative FAA regulations once they have a listed mental health condition on their records. They would need a special issuance to fly again. It seems to us that pilots, including student pilots, face the unenviable choice of hiding their condition and keeping it undisclosed, or reporting it, and being grounded indefinitely. Being grounded means lost income and training time. It also adds expense through required FAA psychological testing (costing the pilot thousands of dollars) for special issuances that, if approved, would allow the pilot to return to flying. To be clear, there needs to be rules in place to keep a potentially unstable pilot from flying. But for the majority who are struggling with anxiety, depression and other treatable forms of mental health conditions, the rules and regulations provide a large barrier to seeking care.

Realizing the current difficulties of approaching mental health in aviation, we decided to establish an initiative in John's memory at the University of North Dakota, the John A. Hauser Mental Health in Aviation Initiative Fund. The fund supports raising awareness about mental health conditions, support students to seek appropriate help for mental health concerns, and encourages peer support. We hope to reduce stigma around mental health conditions and educate students on symptoms as well. At UND the fund helped staff a psychologist who has knowledge in both aviation/FAA regulations and counseling. At UND, a peer-to-peer counseling program **UpLift** has also been established which helps aviation students reach out for assistance from their peers anonymously. The Green Bandana project is another student based program that has been established on campus as well. But more work needs to be done.

We also hope to improve the FAA procedures and regulations that govern mental health conditions in pilots and those who work in aviation. The current system unintentionally fosters healthcare avoidance behaviors. A few of the things we hope to see improved:

- **shortening the time the FAA takes for medical cases and** special issuances to be reviewed (currently an immediate 6-month hold, then up to an additional 18 months to 2 years) would *greatly* help. Adding psychiatric staff for this purpose would help. From 1970-2019 there was **one** staff psychiatrist at the FAA reviewing cases. Just one.

- **Funding research on mental health in aviation.** Dr Billy Hoffman MD, a UND graduate, is currently leading research in this area to better understand and reduce barriers to pilots and controllers who seek care for their mental health and to design a framework that better assesses safety risk. Research data will help guide FAA aeromedical regulations.
- **Streamlining the medical process the FAA uses** and making it more transparent would help. Most pilots do not know where they are in the special issuance process or even if their requested records have been received or reviewed.
- **Reduce the requirement of neuropsychiatric assessments** and testing which are very costly and outdated; pilots are required to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for these tests. **Researching alternative types of accurate, less costly assessments** would help greatly.

We would like to prevent further loss of life and not wait until another tragedy occurs before there is change. Please support **HB # 1612** to create a North Dakota center for aerospace medicine to advance aeromedical research, facilitate aviation research across North Dakota and provide assistance to flight students and aviation professionals to obtain medical certification. We know this important bill will help others, both in and outside of aviation.

Sincerely,

Anne, Alan and Grace Hauser
January 2025

Testimony for John Hauser

Henry Rott

University of North Dakota

It has been over three years since the passing of my friend John Hauser. There are so many things that I wish I could have said to him even now. I am currently in graduate school for counseling psychology. A large reason why I decided to become a mental health counselor is due to John's passing. I decided that I wanted to make a difference in the world that John would want me to make. John was such a kindhearted individual. Every time he would see me, he would run up and give me a hug and we would talk about how we are doing. Little did I know there was a lot more going on in his head than I could have ever imagined.

If John had access to mental health counseling, I believe he would still be here today. I wouldn't have to sit and wonder what I could have done to help him, my fraternity brothers would not have had to sit in disbelief and agony and most importantly, he would be here with his family. John gave so much to other people, he forgot to give to himself. John cared so deeply for everyone and would never hesitate to talk to you if you were feeling down. He carried a cross so large that he thought he could not carry it any longer, and he needed to open up to someone.

John and his family deserved to spend many more Christmases, Thanksgivings and Easters together. Anne and Al are such wonderful people. It is upsetting that I had to meet them under these circumstances, but I am so grateful to know people like them who so deeply care for others that they would advocate so heavily for those who are suffering.

With this bill, I hope we can save lives. That students can feel okay going to a counselor without fear of losing their flight privileges. That students can go home to their families and spend time with them. If you have children yourself, think about them, because you never know when today could be their last. If you could, wouldn't you want to see them? If you could, wouldn't you do anything in the world to protect them? Think about them. Thank you.

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.

According to a 2023 study by the US centers of disease control and prevention (CDC) roughly 1 and 5 adults experience regular feelings of anxiety and worry, well around 1 in 20 experience depression. Left untreated ,these conditions may contribute to approximately 50,000 suicides every year. Pilots and aviation students are no exception to these statistics, highlighting the importance of having accessible mental health support for everyone. The passing of John Hauser in October 2021 brings this issue painfully close to home and strengthens my strong support for ND House Bill 1612.

In the aviation industry, there can be significant challenges when seeking mental health support due to the stigma that surrounds it. Having trained individuals available at the University of North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine will help with diagnosis and treatment of metal health conditions more efficiently and more effectively.

The current FAA medical policy regarding mental health treatment is very cumbersome and difficult to maneuver. Having trained providers at the University of North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine to help navigate the FAA system would benefit pilots and aviation students across North Dakota. Currently commercial airlines and some aviation universities have already started to pave the pathway to having mental health services available. The University of North Dakota is poised to establish theses services for both its students and pilots across North Dakota.

As a nationally acclaimed aviation school of excellence, the University of North Dakota Aerospace Sciences is excellently positioned to provide comprehensive mental health services. In addition, it could also expand and evolve to be a leading hub for expertise in other areas of aviation medicine. The current clinical services offered by the Student Health Center and the close affiliation with the University of North Dakota School of Medicine are valuable resources that can be utilized and collaborated with for expansion of the program.

With your support, the University in North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would be a pioneer in providing medical services to those in the aviation field. This would enhance and build upon the program's existing success.

Amy Diede ,MD

UND '91 and "95

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman & Members of the Human Services Committee,,

My name is Christopher Anderson and I am a student at The University of North Dakota and a certified flight instructor. I am majoring in commercial aviation and expect to graduate this year. As a college student, just like any other, I took around 15-17 credits a semester, with regular exams, and worked 15-20 hours per week. In addition, as an aviation student, I have the additional demands of flight time and the check rides, or at UND we call them stages. A stage check is basically a form of examination, where if you fall short in any aspect of the stage, you will be marked as unsatisfactory, which goes on your FAA record forever. The strive to be perfect can sometimes be overwhelming, especially if you do not have people and resources around you that can support you and help you when you need it the most.

As a flight instructor, I understand that there are laws to a student's learning, one law that I will focus on will be the law of readiness. What this law means is that if the student is not ready to learn, they will not receive the desired outcome of the flight or the lecture being conducted. Now to really understand readiness, we need to zoom out and look at maslows hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy is a five-tier pyramid that starts at the most important need on the bottom of the pyramid. The first or most important one for a student to be ready is that their physiological needs are met, like a roof over their head, or the clothes that they wear and food and water. The second is safety and security. Is the student healthy? Does the student feel safe? Is everything at the students home ok? The third would be love and belonging, this means if they have a loved one in their life, do they feel like they fit in? If they don't fit in, maybe find other pilots that are in the same spot as them. Then you have self-esteem which basically is, does the student feel

confident or have the respect of others. And lastly is self-actualization, which the best way I like to describe it is that the student believes in themselves, and that they truly tell themselves that they can do it. Now why is this important? It directly relates to mental health; if the student does not have good mental health, the student will have a hard time learning, which can make their mental health even worse.

To go flying you need to have a few things on you, first would be a government issued identification, second would be your pilot certificate, and third would be your medical. Now I want to talk about the medical aspect for a moment. There are three different types of medicals. You have your first class which is used mainly for airline transport pilots, you have your second class medical which is used so that if you have your commercial pilot certificate you can get paid when you fly, and your third class medical is mainly for your general aviation flyer who enjoys going up and seeing the world from a different perspective. To receive your first class medical or even second class medical, you need to be fit to fly with every aspect in your life. You will meet up with an aviation medical examiner (or “AME”) and you will go over items including your general health, vision and hearing, cardiovascular health, neurological health, your physical condition, as well as mental health. If one of these items I listed is not up to standards, you will be either rejected from receiving your medical or have restrictions on your medical, which for example could say that you are not allowed to fly at night, cannot fly with passengers as well as other possible limitations. Most prescriptions a doctor can prescribe end up having your medical revoked. For example if I take Advil if I have a headache, I would have to wait at least 48 hours from when I took it to when I can fly again.

Part of your medical examination is your mental health. If a pilot has concerns about their mental health and seeks help, that pilot is likely grounded for an unspecified period of time. So, say you have been flying for 10 years as an airline pilot, but your mental health is starting to take a turn, so you go and get help. Because of the help that you are receiving or have received is on the record, you now have lost your medical. And it can take years to get your medical back, so now you are out of a job and can no longer fly. So as a consequence, pilots have to choose between getting the help they need or keeping their job and their livelihood. As a result, there are many pilots out there that refuse to get help (as evidenced in the Horizon Air Flight 2059 on October 22, 2023), because if they get help, they can lose their job, and in John Hausers case, lose their dream.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for your time and I strongly urge you to pass recommendation for House Bill 1612. I am happy to stand for any question that you may have for me.

Thank you.



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
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BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Landon Bahl

District 17

701-340-7732

lbahl@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Industry, Business and Labor
Government and Veterans Affairs

Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be standing in front of the human services committee to introduce House Bill 1612. For the record, my name is Landon Bahl from Grand Forks, I am also proud to represent the great citizens of District 17 in the house.

I stand before you today to bring House Bill 1612. Please note in front of you is a Christmas tree version of this bill with amendments. You will notice one amendment is to reduce the appropriation from two million dollars down to five hundred thousand dollars. This is because we may have another house bill that we can use as a vehicle for this house bill to get fully funded to the two million dollar mark. However, if that bill does not get funded, with this bill having a small appropriation, we would still be able to proceed with the intent and general goals of this house bill, just not to the fullest extent as planned with the two million dollar funding.

House Bill 1612 is a rather short bill but one that comes with tremendous positive implications for the entire State of North Dakota. In short, this bill stands up the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine. The NDCAM would be housed at The University of North Dakota under the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, and in coordination with the North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. I have no doubt that this committee is very familiar with what the North Dakota Center for Rural Health is and what it does for our state. I would liken the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine to act, look and feel very similar to the Center for Rural Health. This is also why House Bill 1612 has a one-time appropriation of \$500,000. The goal is to stand this entity up, and receive the majority of the funding from a separate house bill as I noted above. If this does not work, the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine will need to look elsewhere for additional funding which will pose challenges. Mr. Chairman and committee members, in a few short minutes, you will hear testimony from subject matter experts on exactly what this bill will do to aid in mental health issues in the aerospace industry.

I want to take a moment to invite this committee to reflect. Think back to the first time you went on a vacation, the thrill of seeing the world from above, crossing an ocean to embark on the trip of a lifetime. Imagine a loved one in need of urgent medical care, their injuries so severe that a life flight crew was dispatched to airlift them to the nearest hospital equipped to save their life. Picture the aircraft that protect our skies, safeguarding the freedoms we hold dear here in the United States. Or even think about the last package you received, shipped from across the country or the world, arriving seamlessly at your doorstep.

Every one of these moments, profound, life-changing, or routine, is made possible because of the extraordinary pilots in our country. These skilled professionals don't just connect cities; they connect people, save lives, secure our nation, and keep the world moving. Without them, these experiences and freedoms we take for granted would look entirely different, fundamentally altering how we live our everyday lives.

The aviation industry is one of the most heavily regulated industries. It is meticulously guarded under the FAA's oversight. Yet, I must say, this relentless guarding has, for decades, resulted in profound and far-

reaching negative consequences for countless lives. As a state, we may not have the power to change how the FAA conducts its business, but we *do* have the power to transform the resources and opportunities available to our aviation professionals right here in North Dakota, professionals who underpin an industry we depend on every single day, often without even realizing it.

Perhaps you've never stopped to consider it this way until now. But today, you will hear tragic and heartbreaking stories, stories that are unfolding not just in our state but across the nation. These stories are a call to action, a reminder that while we cannot alter federal systems, we can and must take bold steps to protect, support, and uplift the aviation professionals whose work impacts all of us in immeasurable ways.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, as you know, North Dakota is a beacon of excellence in aviation. At its heart lies the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences in Grand Forks, the premier aviation academy in the world. We take immense pride in UND for being the largest aviation degree-granting institution globally, supplying our state, our nation, and beyond with the finest, best-trained pilots in the world. But it doesn't stop there. North Dakota is also the hub of unmanned aircraft systems, a vital contributor to the nation's air traffic controllers, individuals who shoulder what many consider the most stressful job in the world to keep our skies safe—and the proud home of two extraordinary Air Force bases and numerous National Guard flight operations.

The aviation industry runs deep in the great State of North Dakota, it's woven into the fabric of who we are. But today, we must confront a reality that no level of training or preparation can fully mitigate: the mental strain faced by aviation professionals, exacerbated by the very systems meant to guide them, such as the FAA. While we recognize that changing federal rules or regulations is a monumental task, we can no longer afford to wait. The time for change is now, and it must start here, with us.

Why now? Because mental health is healthcare. And because the people who keep our skies safe, our nation secure, and our economy moving deserve unimpeded access to resources and professionals who understand the unique challenges of aviation mental health. North Dakota has always led the way in aviation innovation, let us now lead in championing the well-being of the incredible individuals who make it all possible.

For me, this has become a deeply personal mission: to ensure that aviation professionals in our state have the support and resources they need to protect their mental health. No individual should ever feel afraid or ashamed to seek help. In a state that leads the world in aviation, with the best flight schools, the largest UAS hub, unparalleled military bases, and an exceptional Air Guard, we can and must do better. In fact, we have the responsibility to set the standard for the rest of the nation.

I stand before you today not just as an advocate, but as someone who has seen the need for change. I have experienced the heartbreak of losing not one, but two college fraternity brothers far too soon to suicide. Both were extraordinarily successful, deeply admired by all who knew them, and undoubtedly had bright futures ahead. John Hauser was only 19 years old, and Sam McGuire was only 31 years old. Pictures of John and Sam can be seen on the last page of my written testimony. Their losses serve as a constant reminder that mental health struggles do not discriminate, they affect even the strongest, the most accomplished, and the most resilient among us.

If we are to lead in aviation innovation, we must also lead in providing the best mental health resources. We owe it to these professionals to ensure they never feel alone in their struggles. Together, we can honor their commitment and safeguard their well-being.

The pilots I speak of came to our state driven by dreams, passion, and a deep love for the aviation industry. They sought not just a career, but a lifelong journey in the skies, one filled with purpose and promise. Yet, today, we must confront an undeniable truth: the immense pressures imposed by the FAA and the industry as a

whole, coupled with a lack of accessible resources, have created challenges far too heavy for many to bear. I want to take a moment to read this quote from John Hauser to his parents, Anne and Alan, John wrote:

“If there’s anything you could do for me, get the FAA to change their rules on pilots seeking help with their mental health. I know it would change a lot of things for the better and it would help a lot of people out. Love you, John.”

These were John’s last words to his parents found in a note that he had left for them to read after his passing.

If those burdens had been decreased, and if the right resources and support systems had been in place, I firmly believe we would not be here mourning the loss of 19-year-old John Hauser, 31-year-old Sam McGuire, and countless others who shared their dreams. Instead, they would still be with us, soaring under those same blue skies they cherished so dearly. Their absence is a call to action, a reminder that we must do better to protect the lives of those who dedicate themselves to the skies and ensure their dreams do not come at the cost of their well-being.

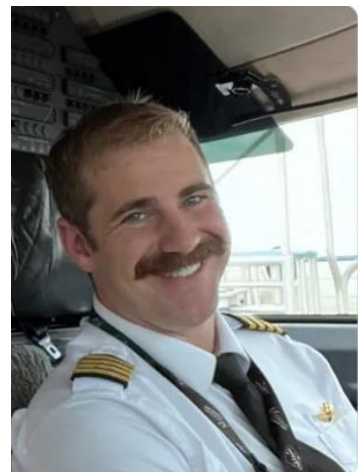
Mr. Chairman, and members of the Human Services committee, thank you for your time, and I urge this committee to put your favorable do pass recommendation on House Bill 1612. I will stand for any questions.

Regards,
Landon Bahl



Pictured left is John Hauser, a student at UND in 2021. John took his own life on October 18, 2021 while piloting a UND training plane at the young age of 19 years old. Throughout the testimony here today you will learn much more about John Hauser. John was a tremendous 19-year-old pilot who had the entire world of aviation in front of him. Mental health and the worries of seeking help due to the FAA and how that would play out with his future played a big role in his decision to end his young life. Pictured right is another brother, Sam McGuire, an alumni of UND, who at the time was working for Southwest Airlines and I believe had just gotten on as a pilot with Delta Airlines. Many would say that Sam had the best

life, new job with one of the best airline carriers, a beautiful girlfriend whom he was soon going to propose to, a house, and some of the best friends that cared deeply about him. What more could you ask for? Unfortunately, deep down, Sam was asking for so much more, but no one knew. The burden of mental health became too much for Sam, and he unfortunately took his own life on August 18, 2023, at the age of 31 years old.



Hello all, my name is Peter, and I had a friend named John Hauser. In a certain light he was a mentor and leader to me as well. Being his friend was such a gift, and wish I could have been his friend forever. During the short tenure I knew him, we spent lots of time together pulling all nighters to drive down to Fargo to go to 24-hour diners, talk about shared classes and its assignments, and ultimately pledging the same fraternity. He was funny, witty, kind, and selfless. On October 18th, 2021, John Hauser took his own life. Ask anybody about his passing, and they will all say that they were blindsided by it. I will never forget where I was when I found out he was missing. No one knew that he was struggling, let alone what with.

For a long time I beat myself up on what could have been done to prevent what happened. How could I have been a better friend? Finally, I came to the conclusion that I could not have done anything, because John didn't want me to do anything. John wanted no one to know he was suffering because he was scared he wouldn't be able to live his dream of becoming a pilot. No one struggling with mental health should have to live in fear of trying to get help.. I'm not a professional, but I think that would make the situation worse. This fear and despair of not knowing where to go to feel better can take you down dark paths leading to much worse ends.

House Bill 1612 can completely change the trajectory of how mental health gets tackled in the aviation industry. It can save future lives. By enacting HB1612, a pilot who is struggling with mental health can reach out to a professional to get help, or least be in a safe space to talk to someone. There was a study of 1,616 pilots that asked if they had underreported information to their AME (aviation medical examiner), to which 3.3% of pilots stated they underreported mental health issues. Per the ND aeronautics commission, over 4,000 pilots live in North Dakota. If that same statistic was true, 130 pilots are suffering from mental health problems that ARE NOT reporting this to their AME. I urge all of you help save your peers who are pilots.

Thanks,

Peter Richards

University of North Dakota Alumni, Delta Tau Delta - Delta Xi Chapter Alumni, and Pilot

Study source:

Strand, Trond-Erik; Lystrup, Nora; Martinussen, Monica. "Under-Reporting of Self-Reported Medical Conditions in Aviation: A cross-Sectional Survey." *Aerospace Medicine and Human Performance* Volume 93 (April 2022): 376–383.

Robert Muhs, Jr
16259 E Powderhorn Dr
Fountain Hills, AZ 85268
January 26, 2025

To: North Dakota House Human Services Committee

I am writing to state my strong support for **HB1612 – Establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine**

Aerospace Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) licensed professionals face mental and physical stresses in their professional lives. For those licensed professionals experiencing these stresses can lead some to hide their problems in order to maintain their FAA Certificates. Unfortunately, some UND flight students, pilots and alumni have taken their lives trying to work with these stresses. It is critically important need that they have access to the proper mental health and wellness resources to resources to navigate these challenges.

Establishing the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine provides a vital resource for UND Aerospace students to gain access mental health and wellness, assistance with medical certification, critical research and collaboration with the FAA, aviation medical examiners, and education and outreach. The Center will enrich the education of students and aerospace medicine and the broader aerospace community's understanding of the stresses and challenges aviation professionals face in their careers.

As I proud UND Odegard School Alumnus, I ask your support for this bill.

Best Regards,

Robert K Muhs, Jr
UND Class of 1977



Committee: North Dakota House Human Services

Topic: Establishment of Center for Aerospace Medicine, and Provision of an Appropriation

Organization: Pilot Mental Health Campaign

Chairman Ruby and Vice Chairman Cleary,

On behalf of The Pilot Mental Health Campaign's thousands of members and volunteers, we want to thank the Committee for accepting this testimony in support of HB 1612. The Pilot Mental Health Campaign (PMHC) is a nationwide nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to improving mental health care access for America's aviators. We are a young but growing organization, driven in part thanks to the brave leadership of many University of North Dakota aviation alumni, who led the way in destigmatizing mental health in collegiate aviation. Together, we are working to update laws, modernize regulations, and bring our aeromedical system into the 21st century. That's why we're so excited to see North Dakota taking the lead in supporting your aviation community by establishing the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine. This center will fill a much-needed gap in both research and access to care, and position UND as the academic leader in this field.

Mental health is the silent epidemic facing the United States. Anxiety and depression are two of the most prevalent manifestations of mental health disease. According to a variety of major national studies, around one in five adults have confronted anxiety or depression in the last year.^{1,2,3} It should be noted these studies do not discriminate based on occupation, or demographic information. Thus, we are left to assume these statistics are representative of the prevalence of mental health issues facing our country's aviation professionals. Take, for example, the University of North Dakota's Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences. In 2022, the school reports headcounts of 26, 20, and 372 for its Unmanned Aircraft Systems, Air Traffic Management, and Commercial Aviation programs, respectively.⁴ With the research currently available, five, four, and seventy-four students in each program statistically face anxiety or depression. Factoring in that the current FAA aeromedical system fosters behaviors of healthcare avoidance and non-reporting of mental health conditions out of fear of losing medical certification,¹ aviation professionals are caught in a no-win situation: avoid treatment to maintain

¹ Hoffman, W. R., Aden, J., Barbera, R. D., Mayes, R., Willis, A., Patel, P., & Tvaryanas, A. (2022). Healthcare Avoidance in Aircraft Pilots Due to Concern for Aeromedical Certificate Loss: A Survey of 3765 Pilots. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, 64(4), e245–e248. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000002519>

certification, or get help and be grounded indefinitely. Aviation is then faced with another dilemma: do pilots or controllers pose an even greater safety risk by not disclosing any mental health struggles than those who do and treat them? As Dr. Anne Suh-Hauser notes, individuals function every day in every industry while dealing with mild to even moderate anxiety or depression. Why should a pilot not be allowed to fly or an air traffic controller not be allowed to keep our National Airspace System safe while treating a mild and entirely ubiquitous condition?

One answer is lack of data, and therefore understanding around mental health. Ergo, the proposed HB 1612 establishing a Center for Aerospace Medicine is a major step in the right direction. The Pilot Mental Health Campaign supports the passage of this landmark legislation. HB 1612 legitimizes the reality of mental health as a problem facing our country's present and future aviators. It offers support and guidance to those who simply want to feel better while performing in careers for which they have trained and proven themselves more than capable. More research will lead to more accurate data, which should be used to formulate better regulations around mental health. The Pilot Mental Health Campaign urges the North Dakota House Human Services Committee to swiftly pass HB 1612 to make North Dakota the national leader in advancing aerospace medicine. We thank the Committee for accepting this testimony on behalf of pilots in North Dakota and across the nation who are looking for just the kind of leadership North Dakota is proposing.

While the bill before you concerns action at the state level, the issue of pilot mental health is one that leaders across the nation are grappling with. America's top transportation safety watchdog, The National Transportation Safety Board has listed the current approach to mental health in aviation as a risk to our gold standard of aviation safety. NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy summed up: "Let me be clear – the safety risk comes from a culture of silence around mental health, *not* about seeking help. The safety risk comes from a culture of silence...a culture that empowers people to get the care they deserve, to be healthy in mind and in body, *that* will strengthen safety."² We could not agree more. The UND Center for Aerospace Medicine will set a new standard for creating that culture of safety.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please reach out to us with any questions.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr213.pdf>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7224a1.htm>

³ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder>

⁴ <https://aero.und.edu/aviation/student-achivement-data.html>

² <https://www.nts.gov/news/events/Pages/Navigating-Mental-Health-in-Aviation.aspx>

My name is Natalie Odier. I graduated from the University of North Dakota in 2021. I support HB 1612, the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine. As someone who sought out the campus mental health resources while studying aviation at UND, this could be monumental in helping give students access to the resources they need and deserve. I can personally attest that I would have used an aerospace medicine center if it had been established before 2021. I really hope this will help alleviate some of the stress and uncertainty of anything medical when it comes to aviation.

Greeting members of the ND House Human Services committee,

I am writing you to testify in favor of House Bill 1612 establishing an aerospace medicine center in North Dakota. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) which manages all regulations relating to airman medical certification has been trying to undergo reforms nationwide in this area. From my experience as an aviation educator and pilot, medical certificates have become a growing frustration in the industry. While the ensuring the health and welfare of all pilots and aircrew is important, in recent years difficulties relating to timeliness and accessibility of Human Intervention Motivation Study (HIMS) Airman Medical Examiners (AME) has made the process for some cumbersome and expensive.

The biggest difficulty has been in mental health; while I think it's appropriate to state the mental health has always been a difficulty, our culture around it has changed for the better. The downside is that FAA hasn't kept up, and so much younger people than before have found themselves having to attend the HIMS program, the closest of which is Minneapolis. The stress and anxiety this causes is compounded by how far they must travel, the missed work, and the extra expenses. Many need to attend multiple appointments, and often spend a few days in follow-ups. Having an aerospace medicine center would be very helpful in that regard.

I advise you work with FAA in establishing it to proper standards and ensure you have qualified AMEs and support staff. This would help alleviate the burden of people who need to attend HIMS and help us form the future of aviation in a more effective way. I urge all members of the committee and the state house of representatives to support this bill and help North Dakota remain a leader in the aerospace industry.

Sincerely,

Lamar Murchison

The University of North Dakota is well positioned to assist thousands of pilots routinely. With around 2,000 flight students attending flight school at UND, along with the overall lack of Aviation Medical Examiners (AME) in the region, many pilots from all over North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota come to UND for their aviation medical examinations as required by the FAA.

As well, UND has HIMS certified AME's to serve pilots with mental health struggles. This is unusual, and difficult to find around the country. Pilots will travel across the country to get this treatment. I have student pilots who will travel home to California or Florida just to receive assistance with their medical certificates, which with the addition of the UND Center for Aerospace Medicine can be provided right here in North Dakota.

This is a unique opportunity to have pilots from all over the country to come to North Dakota for treatment and assistance.

Testimony

Elizabeth Bjerke, Ph.D., Associate Dean, John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences,
University of North Dakota

January 27, 2025

In support of North Dakota House Bill 1612

Dear Chair Ruby and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Bjerke, and I serve as the Associate Dean in the College of Aerospace and Professor of Aviation at the University of North Dakota. I am here today to testify in support for HB 1612.

Unique Barriers Pilots Face Seeking Healthcare

Pilots in the United States, both on the recreational and commercial side of the industry, are required to hold a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) medical certificate to operate an aircraft. These aviation medical certificates can only be issued by FAA designated Aviation Medical Examiners. Depending on their level of pilot certification and age, pilots may need to 'pass' this medical exam as frequently as every 6-months. If a pilot does not 'pass' the medical exam they are unable to pilot an aircraft.

This regulatory medical certification is unique to the aviation industry, and for most pilots not only is flying their livelihood, it is also their identity.

For example, looking around this room, most non-pilots in the room if suffering from anxiety, depression or substance abuse challenges could see their primary care provider or therapist without any ramification to their careers or livelihood. This is not the case for pilots. If a pilot is suffering from a mental health illness the barriers to seeking help are extremely high. **Fear** of losing their medical certificate in turn means they are no longer able to fly. Which also means they may no longer be able to **financially support** their family. Even if a pilot makes a healthy decision to seek help for anxiety or depression, the **FAA Medical Certification process** is complex. It will require seeing a specialized Aviation Medical Examiner called a Human Intervention Motivational Study (HIMS AME), then if medication is prescribed the pilot will need to stay on a stabilized dose for at least six-months before they can even begin the lengthy process for a special issuance aviation medical certificate. Pilots simply do not **trust** this process; thus, often do not seek the care they need. Additionally, the **access** to the specialized FAA designated HIMS Aviation Medical Examiner is very limited, especially in a rural state like North Dakota. All of these barriers combined leads to a dangerous culture of pilots not seeking the health care they need to thrive.

Attached to this testimony is an image found in a recent FAA Aviation Rulemaking Committee's final report in regards to Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances that was released on April 1, 2024. This image attempts to depict the current aeromedical process and barriers pilots face. It illustrates the complexity of the issue with no real guidance for solutions. North Dakota has a strong aviation community with nearly 5,000 pilots, making us the 2nd leading state of pilots per capita who will likely at some point in their flying careers experience a physical or mental health issue that will need guidance by experts to navigate the FAA aeromedical process.

Aviation Mental Health at UND

Concern for the mental health of our aviation students at UND was amplified during the COVID pandemic, while the whole world was suffering through this major event, it was evident that our aviation students didn't feel like they could seek help due to the fear of losing their FAA aviation medical certificates. During the Spring of 2021, we brought together a group of experts from across our campus to discuss aviation mental health and think of ways we could help our aviation student population. Then in the Fall of 2021 tragedy struck our program, the death of John Hauser made us realize that we needed to engage outside of our university if we were going to make significant change. In December of 2021, UND hosted the first Aviation Mental Health Summit. We brought together other collegiate aviation programs, airline partners, mental health professionals and most importantly the FAA. We spent a whole day in discussions and collaborations, with tangible takeaways. We have continued to support an annual Aviation Mental Health Symposium bringing together experts from around the country.

One of the takeaways from these focused discussions was the need to invest in an infrastructure to build our expertise in a network of support for our students. In early 2023, UND showed support for this initiative by granting Strategic Investment funds of over \$600,000 to start building an aerospace medicine network that would increase access to care for our students.

Resources Established at UND

UND's Student Health Services has a long history in providing FAA Aviation Medical Certification dating back to 1970, essentially the same timeframe as when the aviation program was established at UND. Today, UND's Student Health Services employs three FAA Aviation Medical Examiners and conducts nearly 1,000 aviation medicals a year. Through the strategic investment funds, we have been able to support an AME in getting their FAA HIMS certification, meaning that this individual is now able to help pilots needing to navigate the FAA medical process for mental health and substance abuse issues. We have also been able to train additional clinical support staff to assist with FAA paperwork required as part of the special issuance process. The UND Counseling Center on campus was able to hire and embed a full-time aviation psychologist to work directly with the College of Aerospace to provide therapy and outreach to our students. We have also supported three psychologists in also getting their HIMS designations so that they can provide the needed assessments and evaluations for pilots that are required for the FAA

medical certification process. All of these resources are in place to help break down the barriers for our aviation students at UND.

In closing

Now that we have invested in the needed resources at UND to serve our aviation student population, I believe that we are well positioned to also assist the nearly 5,000 pilots across the state of North Dakota. We are eager to work with the North Dakota Aviation Association, North Dakota Aeronautics Commission, North Dakota Medical Association and North Dakota Psychological Association to help educate and provide support. By establishing the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine, we would be able to create a statewide network by leveraging the expertise established at UND. I strongly support a 'Do Pass' vote on HB 1612.

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<https://designee.faa.gov/designeeLocator>

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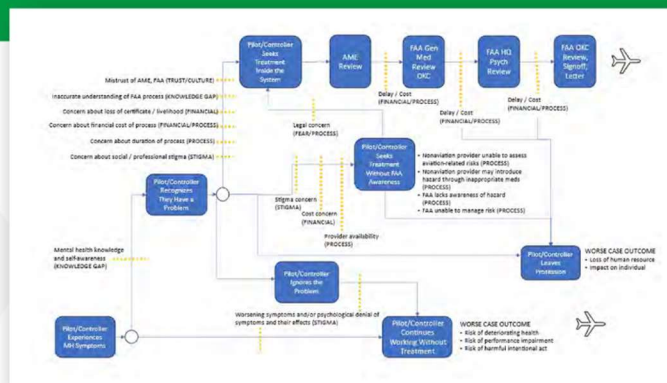


North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine

Testimony in Support of HB 1612

Unique Barriers Pilots Face Seeking Healthcare

- Fear
- Trust
- Stigma
- FAA Aeromedical Process
- Lack of access to specialized care
- Financial concerns
- Culture



*FAA ARC Final Report – Mental Health & Aviation Medical Clearances (April 1, 2024)



Aviation Mental Health at UND



UND LEARNING
EQUITY
AFFINITY
DISCOVERY
SERVICE

- Concern for the mental well-being of our students was amplified during the COVID Pandemic
 - What started as an internal discussion turned external following John Hauser's passing
 - Hosted first Aviation Mental Health Summit in December 2021
 - Brought together collegiate aviation programs, airlines and the FAA
 - UND plays pivotal role in hosting this annual summit focused on aviation mental health
 - Strong stigma surrounding mental health and aviation coupled with lack of access to services and knowledge of navigating the FAA complex process
- UND Internal Support – UND Strategic Investment Funds
 - In order to grow the concept at UND we were successful in receiving institutional strategic investment funds in 2023 (FY24/FY25)



UND UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH DAKOTA

Resources Established at UND

- UND Student Health Services
 - Long history in providing FAA aviation medicals to pilots and air traffic controllers
 - 3 Aviation Medical Examiners (AME) conducting nearly 1000 aviation medicals a year
- UND Counseling Center
 - Long history of providing mental health related resources for UND students
- UND John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences
 - Nearly 1,900 flight students on campus in a given year needing to navigate the aviation medical process
- UND School of Medicine and Health Science – focuses on rural health
- UND Strategic Investment Funds and John Hauser Memorial Fund supported:
 - Obtained additional FAA certification to support mental health and substance abuse cases
 - Referred to as HIMS designation for both AMEs (1) and psychologists (3)
 - Need this expertise/designation to work with pilots navigating the FAA process for mental health related issues
 - Ability to hire more support staff to assist with the complex FAA paperwork process
 - Hired an embedded aviation psychologist for the aviation program



UND UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota Legislative Council
State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

January 25, 2025

To the people of the North Dakota Human Services Committee,

I am writing today in support of **House Bill 1612** which would offer a \$2 Million appropriation that would positively impact the development of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine.

My background is in the medical field as I worked at Altru Hospital for 17 years as an RN, I now proudly work as a Flight Physiologist at UND Aerospace. This department focuses mostly on the physiological/physical effects that can occur within the body while we are in flight. Having been in healthcare so long, I also know not only the physiological or physical effects can hurt human performance.

Seeing the wide array of mental health struggles in our society was very abundant while working in healthcare, in the aviation world it is also very common, but not discussed. There is a wide variety of reasons students do not seek help, the biggest reason being misinformation regarding losing their medical certification to fly aircraft. Students would rather take information from an inconspicuous source like the rumor mill instead of seeking professional help. This is one of the biggest reasons why I support this bill and the idea of UND having their own center for Aerospace medicine. Here at UND, we are so lucky to have a robust, world class medical mchool as well as the valued and respected John D Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences. There is no doubt, that when these two combine it will be an absolute powerhouse, providing top tier services to our students, especially for those struggling with mental health.

Respectfully,

Jennifer M Watne, RN

Physiologist

Odegard Hall, Room 259

3980 Campus Rd Stop 9007

Grand Forks, ND 58202

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

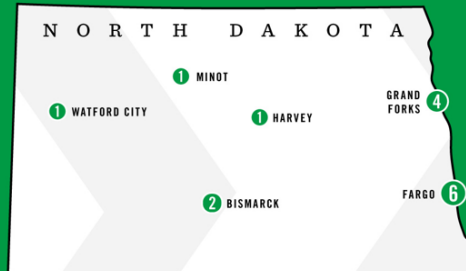
Partner with the North Dakota Aviation Association and North Dakota Aeronautics Commission to provide educational opportunities for pilots regarding aviation medical certification

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

Support for HB1612: Enhancing Pilots' Mental Health Research

Dear Members of the Legislative Assembly,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB1612, a bill that seeks to establish funding for medical research into pilots' mental health, with the facility to be set up at the University of North Dakota's Center for Aerospace Sciences.

As a seasoned airline executive with over 30 years of experience and an alumnus of the University of North Dakota (UND), I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that pilots face in maintaining their first-class medical certifications during various life events. The loss of this certification often means the end of a pilot's career, a reality that underscores the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support in this field.

It is imperative that UND, a leader in aerospace education, spearheads the development of a research-based medical approach to help young men and women develop the necessary tools to navigate these challenges. Proper medical research is crucial in equipping pilots with strategies to maintain their mental health and ensure their continued certification and career longevity.

Furthermore, it is vitally important that these tools and strategies are also developed for pilots already well into their careers. By doing so, we can ensure that our airline systems remain the safest in the world, backed by pilots who are supported both physically and mentally.

UND's Center for Aerospace Sciences is uniquely positioned to lead this initiative, given its expertise and resources. The establishment of a dedicated facility for pilot mental health research will not only benefit individual pilots but will also enhance the overall safety and reliability of our airline industry.

I urge you to support HB1612 and the vital work it aims to accomplish. Your backing will make a significant difference in promoting mental health research for pilots and ensuring the continued excellence and safety of our airline systems.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

James (Jack) Muhs

SVP Aviation Safety and Technology at FedEx Express (Retired)

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.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the North Dakota State House of Representatives,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony today. I'm grateful that the conversation about mental health in aviation has begun, and I'm honored to contribute. My name is Jack Rodriguez, and I'm a senior at the University of North Dakota, majoring in commercial aviation.

Over the last decade, mental health concerns and diagnoses have skyrocketed, and society has started to focus more on awareness, education, and treatment. Yet, one crucial part of our society remains largely overlooked: aviation and our pilots. Studies show that depression affects 12.6% of airline pilots, while substance abuse impacts anywhere from 8.5% to 15%. Considering there are roughly 100,000 active airline pilots in the U.S., these numbers should be deeply concerning. And this is just a small slice of the broader pilot community. In total, there are over 600,000 licensed pilots in the United States—each of us sharing a passion for flying, but also facing similar struggles when it comes to mental health support.

The process of becoming a certified pilot is an exciting but incredibly demanding journey. In my own experience at the University of North Dakota, the pressure of meeting deadlines is ever-present, as it is in any profession. But what makes aviation unique is that so much of our training is beyond our control. For instance, to earn a private pilot license, one must complete a solo cross-country flight. But to even attempt it, the weather conditions need to be near perfect. Living in North Dakota, where weather can be unpredictable, conditions for such a flight are rare. I know classmates who have waited over a month for just this one task, facing countless cancellations along the way.

This constant uncertainty can take a toll on your morale and motivation. The stress of delays, coupled with the pressure to succeed, can make it easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. While not everyone feels this way, I've personally experienced these challenges. The emotional strain of waiting for conditions to improve has caused significant stress and impacted my mental health. In an attempt to manage, I turned to the university's peer support system, Uplift, but found it lacking in effectiveness. While I appreciate the university's efforts, it's clear that more needs to be done.

Sadly, I've seen firsthand what can happen when the weight of stress and mental battles becomes too much to bear. In October of 2021, I lost my friend and fellow pilot, John Hauser, to suicide. This is why I write to you today—to urge you to take action.

As representatives of the state that's home to one of the best flight schools in the country and a global leader in aviation excellence, you have the power to make a significant difference. Pilots, both young and old, deserve access to the mental health support we need without fear of

judgment or repercussions. My choice of career should not limit my ability to seek help when I need it most.

I urge you to vote yes on Bill 1612. By doing so, you'll be supporting generations of pilots to come and ensuring that we can continue to soar without the added weight of mental health stigma. Thank you.



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE & HEALTH SCIENCES

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January 26, 2025

The Honorable Members of the North Dakota Legislature
State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Avenue #160
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Chair Ruby and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

I am writing to discuss the need for North Dakota to establish a Center for Aerospace Medicine at the University of North Dakota (UND). As envisioned, this would be a broad collaborative project between the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences (SMHS), UND Student Health Services, John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, College of Engineering and Mines's Aerospace Engineering program, and the Department of Psychology. As we continue to advance the fields of health and medicine in our state, this project presents a unique and vital opportunity to integrate aerospace medicine into SMHS's curriculum, expand support services to our aviation community, and tackle the growing concern of mental health in aviation.

North Dakota has long been a leader in pioneering solutions for the unique health challenges faced by rural and underserved populations. Our institution is poised to be a valuable partner in this initiative, as we bring our expertise in rural health and behavioral medicine to bear on the critical needs of the aerospace community. With the establishment of the proposed Center for Aerospace Medicine, we will enhance the training and resources available to medical practitioners in our state, ensuring they are well-versed in aviation regulatory medicine. This specialized training is essential not only for maintaining aviation safety but also for addressing the unique medical needs of pilots and other aviation professionals across the state.

Of particular concern is the growing issue of mental health challenges among pilots. High rates of mental illness, including depression and anxiety, are prevalent in the aviation industry. There are specific challenges that pilots face that can contribute to mental health issues, including long hours, time away from family, irregular sleep patterns, and the high-stress environment of aviation. However, a significant barrier to addressing these challenges is the stigma that exists around seeking mental health support. Many pilots fear that disclosing mental health concerns will jeopardize their careers, and this can lead to a dangerous reluctance to seek help. This initiative would help us to break down these barriers and promote a culture of mental wellness in aviation, offering pilots and aviation professionals a safe and confidential space to seek the help they need.

A key component of this initiative is the introduction of an elective 4th-year rotation in aerospace medicine through the medical program, which will offer our medical students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in this highly specialized field. By developing this rotation, we can create a pipeline of physicians who are well-equipped to serve the

growing needs of the aerospace industry, both in North Dakota and beyond. This expansion will ensure that our state remains at the forefront of training physicians capable of addressing aviation-related health challenges.

In addition, the integration of the proposed Center for Aerospace Medicine will allow us to leverage our existing clinical infrastructure across North Dakota, providing aviation medical certification services, outreach programs, and critical care support in a region that includes many rural and remote communities. By utilizing our established network, we can ensure that a rural network is developed so that individuals involved in aviation have access to necessary medical services, regardless of their location. Additionally, our Centers for Family Medicine in Bismarck and Minot provide much needed access to primary health care for the citizens of North Dakota, including mental health services.

Pilots are required to pass a specific medical examination from a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-certified licensed physician, known as an aviation medical examiner (AME), to ensure the physical and mental fit of the pilot. Specialized training and an FAA examination are needed by the licensed physician for this certification. The Centers for Family Medicine may serve as hubs for AME providers to broaden access to this specialized medical care across the state. This also provides a tremendous opportunity to better serve our state and the nation through advocating within the federal regulatory environment for physician assistants and nurse practitioners to be certified to conduct FAA medical examinations and provide further medical certifications to current and future pilots.

The proposed Center for Aerospace Medicine will not only provide essential health services but will also serve as a national model for how to integrate behavioral health into aviation medicine, helping reduce stigma and encouraging pilots to prioritize their mental health. Through UND's top ranked aerospace, aerospace engineering, medical doctor, physician assistant, nursing, psychology, and student support programs, the University is uniquely positioned to support current and future pilots across the state.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marjorie R. Jenkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Marjorie Jenkins

Dean, School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Vice President for Health Affairs, University of North Dakota



January 27th, 2025

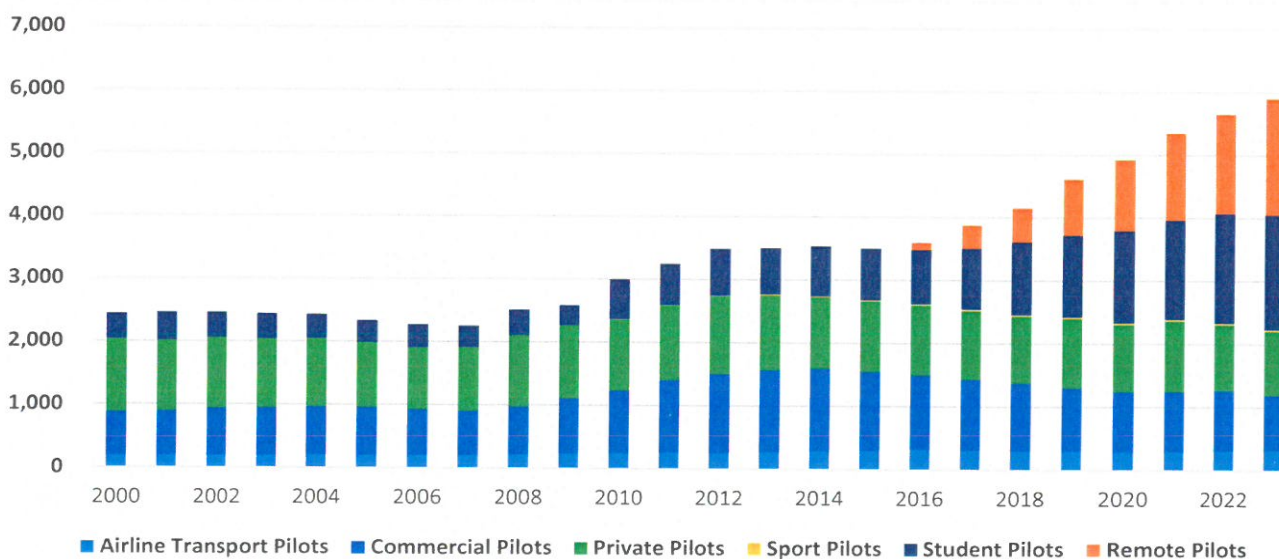
RE: Testimony to House Human Services Committee – HB 1612

Chair Ruby and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the North Dakota Aeronautics Commission, I am submitting this testimony to express support for 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 offers far-reaching benefits to North Dakota's aviation community.

The graphic below presents a historical overview of the number of active pilots residing in North Dakota, serving as a valuable indicator of the health of our aviation industry. Active pilots are defined as those who are licensed and hold a valid medical certificate. Over the past decade, the number of student pilots has grown as the University of North Dakota and other flight training programs across the state have expanded to meet the rising demand for pilot training amid the ongoing national pilot shortage. Additionally, the number of remote pilots in the state continues to increase as the unmanned aircraft industry grows.

Active Pilots in North Dakota



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

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyle Wanner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kyle C. Wanner
Executive Director
ND Aeronautics Commission



January 26, 2025

RE: Testimony to House Human Services Committee – HB 1612

Chair Ruby and Members of the Committee,

As Chairman of the North Dakota Aviation Association (NDAA), and member of the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 1612, which proposes the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine at the University of North Dakota (UND).

Aerospace medicine is a cornerstone of the aviation industry, safeguarding the health and performance of pilots, flight students, and aviation personnel who are vital to the success of our state's aviation sector.

UND Health at the University of North Dakota already performs nearly 1,000 aviation medical certification exams annually—our region's highest volume of such exams. This impressive figure underscores the University of North Dakota's established expertise and dedication to ensuring the safety and well-being of aviation professionals.

Moreover, the University of North Dakota is recognized globally as a world-class aviation training institution, attracting students and professionals from around the world. By leveraging this renowned reputation and deep well of expertise, House Bill 1612 would allow the University of North Dakota to further serve our state, our region, and the aviation industry as a whole by creating a Center for Aerospace Medicine.

This initiative will enhance access to critical aviation health services and solidify North Dakota's leadership in advancing aerospace medicine and supporting the aviation workforce.

To make this vision a reality, we urge the committee to support House Bill 1612, as it will:

- Provide much-needed support to ease the complicated and time-consuming special issuance medical certification process currently experienced in our region.
- Play a pivotal role in providing support, enhancing career development, and promoting safer skies for all pilots and aviation professionals by ensuring reliable access to medical certification to stay compliant with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations.
- Improve access to specialized aviation medical services, including access to Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs) and Human Intervention Motivational Study (HIMS) certified examiners, by enabling physicians to travel to underserved communities, thus ensuring our state's rural aviators receive the medical services they need to continue safely flying.
- Create a platform for aerospace and space medicine research, helping North Dakota emerge as a national leader in this field.

- Provide medical and educational support needed to meet the demands of professionals in commercial aviation, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and air traffic control.
- Serve as an educational resource for flight students, aviation workers, and the public.

Chair Ruby and Members of the Committee, the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine represents a transformative opportunity for our state to address critical needs in aviation health, support the well-being of aviation professionals, and reinforce North Dakota's position as a leader in aerospace innovation. House Bill 1612 will empower the University of North Dakota to expand its exceptional track record in education and aviation medicine while providing vital resources to underserved communities and enhancing the safety and efficiency of the aviation industry. We respectfully urge your committee's support of House Bill 1612, as it is not only an investment in the future of aviation but also in the economic vitality and global recognition of North Dakota.

Sincerely,



Tanner Overland

Chairman

North Dakota Aviation Association





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



Tajae Viaene
Director of Flight School Operations
Fargo Jet Center
01/27/2025

Dear Members of the North Dakota Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed bill to further develop the Aerospace Medicine Center at the University of North Dakota (UND). This initiative represents a critical opportunity to advance aviation safety and medical services for pilots across North Dakota, particularly in our rural communities.

As the leader of a team of flight instructors at the Fargo Jet Center Flight School, I am deeply committed to the health and well-being of the pilots I work with every day. Aviation is a demanding field, and ensuring that pilots have access to specialized medical resources—such as HIMS Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs) and HIMS psychologists—is essential to maintaining their health, safety, and ability to perform their duties.

The proposed funding for the Aerospace Medicine Center is more than an investment in UND—it is an investment in the future of aviation in North Dakota. By enabling the center to serve not only student pilots but also aviation professionals across the state, this bill will help strengthen the safety and sustainability of our industry. Importantly, it will also provide much-needed access to specialized aviation medical care for pilots in rural areas, who often face significant barriers to receiving such services.

North Dakota has long been a leader in aviation, and this initiative reflects our state's ongoing commitment to innovation, safety, and excellence. I urge you to support this legislation and help UND continue to make a meaningful impact on our aviation community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or require additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Tajae Viaene
Director of Flight School Operations
Fargo Jet Center
tviaene@fargojet.com

3306 Farleton Lane
Roseville, CA 95747

January 27, 2025

Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota
State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Subject: Letter of Support for House Bill No. 1612, North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine

House Bill No. 1612 would establish the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine and provide an appropriation to establish and operate it. I write in support of creating this center and funding it as a great step to aid current and prospective pilots and air traffic controllers in getting needed healthcare, navigating Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) policies on medical certification, and building further on the University of North Dakota's leadership in the aviation industry.

I am an aviation safety professional in business aviation as well as a certificated pilot and flight instructor who is familiar with the complexities of the FAA medical certification process and policies for pilots and air traffic controllers. I graduated from the University of North Dakota in 2004 with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Aviation Management. While a student at UND, I joined Delta Tau Delta fraternity, of which John Hauser and Sam McGuire were members. Tragically, John and Sam died by suicide in 2021 and 2023, respectively. John felt he couldn't get the mental healthcare he needed without jeopardizing his aviation medical certificate. This is a challenge felt by many pilots in the industry for mental health and other medical conditions, which often leads to healthcare avoidant behavior and conditions that may worsen when left untreated.

Fitness for Duty is a broad aviation safety concept that encompasses periodic medical certification by the regulatory authority as well as an individual assessment at the time of the duty period to ensure that the pilot or air traffic controller is able to safely perform their aviation-related duties. Medical and mental health conditions, some medications, and even normal life stressors can all be things that may necessitate standing down for a period of time to ensure the pilot or air traffic controller is able to safely perform their duties. While aspects of fitness for duty are taught during pilot or air traffic controller training, medical histories that existed before the pilot or air traffic controller began training, or medical or mental health conditions that developed long after the individual became a pilot or controller, oftentimes complicate aeromedical certification of the individual.

The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would provide a respected educational voice to the industry that acknowledges pilots and air traffic controllers' concerns about

seeking healthcare and maintaining their FAA medical certification and help build trust between pilots and air traffic controllers and the FAA. It would also provide access to the medical professionals with specific FAA authorizations to conduct the exams and testing, and support for the administrative processing with the FAA that adds to the complexity of medical certification by Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs).

The FAA Airmen Certification System indicates there are over 4,000 active pilots in North Dakota¹, many of whom could benefit from the resources of this center. Currently there are 14 FAA AMEs in North Dakota, and some are close to retirement. Only 2 of the AMEs in North Dakota are authorized to perform the exams of pilots and air traffic controllers that are taking antidepressant medications or have a history of alcohol or substance abuse or dependence. Further, the center would provide access to FAA-authorized aviation neuropsychology and psychology personnel that are required as part of the FAA's certification processes for a number of conditions.

Regionally, the FAA Airmen Certification System indicates there are over 24,000 pilots in North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota combined², and the presence of this center is likely to benefit pilots and air traffic controllers from outside of North Dakota too. When we consider the research possibilities that exist with the FAA, Department of Defense, and Space Medicine, among other organizations, the positive impact of the center is likely to extend to many more of the nation's 800,000+ pilots.

To put the pilot statistics into the context of mental health, national statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services show that about half of all people will be diagnosed with a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime³, and 1 in 5 adults will face a mental health challenge in any given year⁴. I've spoken with a number of aviation mental health providers who confirm that rates of mental health challenges are consistent between aviation personnel and the overall population.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data show the following 5-year trends related to mental health conditions and mental healthcare for adults aged 18 and over. In nearly all of these metrics, the trendline shows an increase in the condition or treatment for it.

¹ FAA Airmen Registry Report: https://registry.faa.gov/activeairmen/M70_Active_Pilots_Summary.pdf#page=5

² FAA Airmen Registry Report: https://registry.faa.gov/activeairmen/M70_Active_Pilots_Summary.pdf#page=5

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/mental-health-and-mental-disorders>

⁴ National Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://www.nami.org/about-mental-illness/mental-health-by-the-numbers/>

Year	Counseled by a mental health professional in the past 12 months ⁵	Regularly had feelings of depression ⁶	Taking prescription medication for feelings of depression ⁷	Regularly had feelings of worry, nervousness, or anxiety ⁸	Taking prescription medication for feelings of worry, nervousness, or anxiety ⁹
2019	9.5%	4.7%	9.8%	11.1%	11.7%
2020	10.1%	4.4%	10.3%	11.2%	12.1%
2021	11.1%	4.5%	10.6%	11.3%	12.9%
2022	12.6%	5.1%	11.5%	12.7%	14.1%
2023	13.4%	4.9%	11.4%	12.5%	14.3%

Similarly, considering that today’s youth are tomorrow’s pilots and air traffic controllers (and incoming UND aviation students), CDC data show higher percentages of mental health symptoms and treatment by youth aged 12-17 years than adults. These individuals are more likely to need the center’s expertise as FAA medical certification policies require disclosure of conditions that have “ever in your life occurred” and, at a minimum, visits to medical and mental health providers that have occurred within the last 3 years.

⁵ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of mental health counseling in the past 12 months for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019—2023. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html

⁶ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of regularly had feelings of depression for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019—2023. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html

⁷ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of taking prescription medication for feelings of depression for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019—2023. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html

⁸ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of regularly had feelings of worry, nervousness, or anxiety for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019—2023. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html

⁹ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of taking prescription medication for feelings of worry, nervousness, or anxiety for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019—2023. National Health Interview Survey. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html

Year	Any mental health therapy	Symptoms of Depression	Symptoms of Anxiety	Any prescription medication for mental health
July 2021-December 2022	19.7% ¹⁰	17.4% ¹¹	21.2% ¹²	13.7% ¹³
July 2021-December 2023	19.8% ¹⁴	17.8% ¹⁵	19.7% ¹⁶	15.6% ¹⁷

Current perceptions and realities of FAA aeromedical policy keep a considerable number of aviation professionals from seeking treatment for their mental health. A 2022 study found that 56% of pilots reported a history of healthcare avoidance behavior due to fear for losing their medical certificate¹⁸. That same study indicated that 26% of pilots misrepresented or withheld information on a written healthcare questionnaire for fear of medical certificate loss. If medical certification is to be an effective screening tool for ensuring aviation safety, it requires honesty, trust, and workable policies for both the

¹⁰ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of teens aged 12-17 years who received any mental health therapy in the past 12 months, United States, July 2021-December 2022. National Health Interview Survey—Teen. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from

https://wwwndev.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/NHIS_TEEN/index.html

¹¹ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of teens aged 12-17 years with symptoms of depression during the past 2 weeks, United States, July 2021-December 2022. National Health Interview Survey—Teen. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from

https://wwwndev.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/NHIS_TEEN/index.html

¹² National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of teens aged 12-17 years with symptoms of anxiety during the past 2 weeks, United States, July 2021-December 2022. National Health Interview Survey—Teen. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from

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¹³ National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of teens aged 12-17 years who took prescription medication to help with emotions, concentration, behavior or mental health in the past 12 months, United States, July 2021-December 2022. National Health Interview Survey—Teen. Generated interactively: Jan 27 2025 from https://wwwndev.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/NHIS_TEEN/index.html

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¹⁸ Hoffman WR, Aden J, Barbera RD, Mayes R, Willis A, Patel P, Tvaryanas A. Healthcare Avoidance in Aircraft Pilots Due to Concern for Aeromedical Certificate Loss: A Survey of 3765 Pilots. *J Occup Environ Med.* 2022 Apr 1;64(4):e245-e248. doi: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000002519. Epub 2022 Feb 15. PMID: 35166258.

regulator and the regulated. UND's aviation and medical expertise, research capabilities, and leadership are well matched to the creation of this center for aerospace medicine to better understand the implications of current policies and provide the data to substantiate changes in the interest of safety.

In summary, the establishment of and funding for the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine is time and money well spent by the North Dakota Legislature to support the aviation community in North Dakota and across the country, build on the well-established aviation legacy at UND, and help shape a healthier, safer path for the future.

Sincerely,

Mark E. Larsen, CAM

To whom it may concern,

My name is Samuel Schwartz and I am a commercial aviation student at the University of North Dakota. I am writing to you to express my support for this new bill that could help my friends and family in the aviation world with mental health and support. John Hauser was a great friend and an honorable man who tragically took his life because of the fear he had of losing his career.

I won't go into detail with his story, but the support that this bill proposes could've helped John with his mental health struggle and this bill should be passed, so that there are no more students that take their life because of the fear of losing their careers.

The FAA and aviation industry is the safest in the world. The strict standards they hold us to are important and I support everything that they believe in and do, but as our country moves forward in this age mental health is a topic that is finally being addressed. With the new AME standards they want to implement, people would no longer have to fear losing their medicals and can address their health issues instead of trying to hide them, because simply denying the issues and not addressing it isn't safe and goes against the safety first culture the FAA believes in.

UND is a leader in the aviation industry and North Dakota as a whole can be a leader in the country by passing this bill and getting the ball moving to support a safer, stronger aviation industry.

Thank you for allowing me to voice my opinion, this bill will carry on my fallen brother's legacy, and will lead to a safer industry.

Samuel Schwartz,
Senior Aviation Student at the University of North Dakota

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Pioneer Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
2/5/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine; and to provide an appropriation.

4:58 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby opened the meeting.

Members Present: Chairman Ruby, Vice-Chairman Frelich, Representatives K. Anderson, Beltz, Bolinske, Davis, Dobervich, Fegley, Hendrix, Kiefert, Rios, Rohr

Members Absent: Representative Holle

Discussion Topics:

- Committee work
- Amendments relating to clarity of language and reduced appropriations

5:04 p.m. Representative K. Anderson moved to adopt the amendments relating to clarity of language and reduced appropriations.

5:04 p.m. Vice-Chairman Frelich seconded the motion.

5:04 p.m. Voice Vote passed.

5:05 p.m. Representative K. Anderson moved a do pass as amended and rerefer to appropriations.

5:05 p.m. Representative Rohr seconded the motion.

5:16 p.m. Representative K. Anderson rescinded the motion.

5:16 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby closed the meeting.

Jackson Toman, Committee Clerk

2-10-25

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

JB 1 of 2

HOUSE BILL NO. 1612

Introduced by

Representatives Bahl, K. Anderson, O'Brien, Schreiber-Beck, Stemen

Senators Axtman, Cory, Meyer

- 1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine
3 for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

- 5 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
6 and enacted as follows:

7 **North Dakota center for aerospace medicine.**

- 8 1. The university of North Dakota with the school of medicine and health sciences shall
9 establish the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine under the John D. Odegard
10 school of aerospace sciences.
- 11 2. The North Dakota center for aerospace medicine shall:
- 12 a. Provide mental health resources and assistance to obtain medical certification
13 from the federal aviation administration to flight students, pilots, and aviation
14 professionals in the fields of commercial aviation, unmanned aircraft systems,
15 and air traffic control to obtain medical certification from the federal aviation
16 administration;
- 17 b. Cooperate with the federal aviation administration office of aerospace medicine;
- 18 c. Support access, including rural access, to mental health resources, aviation
19 medical examiners, and human intervention motivational study aviation medical
20 examiners;

09B 2002

- 1 d. Provide support to assist aviation medical examiners, human intervention
- 2 motivational study aviation medical examiners, and applicants with federal
- 3 aviation administration requirements;
- 4 e. Facilitate collaboration between research initiatives across the state related to
- 5 aviation and space medicine; and
- 6 f. Provide mental health education and outreach.

7 **SECTION 2. APPROPRIATION - UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA - NORTH DAKOTA**
8 **CENTER FOR AEROSPACE MEDICINE.** There is appropriated out of any moneys in the
9 general fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of ~~\$2,000,000~~ \$500,000,
10 or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the university of North Dakota for the purpose
11 of planning, developing, establishing, and operating the North Dakota center for aerospace
12 medicine, including personnel recruitment and salaries, facility and assessment material costs,
13 professional development and training, education and outreach, and initial research funding, for
14 the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

25.1268.03002
Title.04000

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Representative Bahl
January 27, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

HOUSE BILL NO. 1612

Introduced by

Representatives Bahl, K. Anderson, O'Brien, Schreiber-Beck, Stemen

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14 professionals in the fields of commercial aviation, unmanned aircraft systems,
15 and air traffic control to obtain medical certification from the federal aviation
16 administration;
 - 17 b. Cooperate with the federal aviation administration office of aerospace medicine;
 - 18 c. Support access, including rural access, to mental health resources, aviation
19 medical examiners, and human intervention motivational study aviation medical
20 examiners;

d. Provide support to assist aviation medical examiners, human intervention motivational study aviation medical examiners, and applicants with federal aviation administration requirements;

e. Facilitate collaboration between research initiatives across the state related to aviation and space medicine; and

f. Provide mental health education and outreach.

SECTION 2. APPROPRIATION - UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA - NORTH DAKOTA CENTER FOR AEROSPACE MEDICINE. There is appropriated out of any moneys in the general fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of ~~\$2,000,000~~ \$500,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the university of North Dakota for the purpose of planning, developing, establishing, and operating the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine, including personnel recruitment and salaries, facility and assessment material costs, professional development and training, education and outreach, and initial research funding, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Pioneer Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
2/10/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine; and to provide an appropriation.

9:46 a.m. Chairman M. Ruby opened the meeting.

Members Present: Chairman M. Ruby, Vice-Chairman Frelich, Representatives Beltz, Bolinske, Davis, Fegley, Hendrix, Holle, Kiefert, Rios, Rohr
Members Absent: Representative K. Anderson, Dobervich

Discussion Topics:

- Committee action

9:49 a.m. Representative Holle moved a Do Pass as amended and rereferred to appropriations.

9:50 a.m. Representative Kiefert seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Matthew Ruby	Y
Representative Kathy Frelich	Y
Representative Karen Anderson	AB
Representative Mike Beltz	Y
Representative Macy Bolinske	N
Representative Jayme Davis	Y
Representative Gretchen Dobervich	AB
Representative Cleyton Fegley	Y
Representative Jared Hendrix	N
Representative Dawson Holle	Y
Representative Dwight Kiefert	Y
Representative Nico Rios	Y
Representative Karen Rohr	N

9:51 a.m. Motion passed 8-3-2.

Representative Holle will carry the bill.

9:51 a.m. Chairman M. Ruby closed the meeting.

Jackson Toman, Committee Clerk

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1612**

Human Services Committee (Rep. M. Ruby, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.1268.03002](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** and **BE REREFERRED** to the **Appropriations Committee** (8 YEAS, 3 NAYS, 2 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1612 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar.

2025 HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS

HB 1612

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Roughrider Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
2/18/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

4:03 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Vigesaa, Vice Chairman Kempenich, Representatives Anderson, Bosch, Fisher, Hanson, Louser, Martinson, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner
Members absent: Representatives Berg, Brandenburg, Meier

Discussion Topics:

- FAA support
- Data collection
- Maintenance of current services
- Expansion of services

4:03 p.m. Representative M. Ruby introduced the bill.

4:11 p.m. Representative Bahl testified in favor.

4:21 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa closed the hearing.

Mary Brucker, Committee Clerk, for Sierra Schartz, Committee Clerk

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Roughrider Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
2/18/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

7:09 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa Called the hearing to order.

Members present: Chairman Vigesaa, Vice Chairman Kempenich, Representatives Anderson, Bosch, Fisher, Hanson, Louser, Martinson, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner
Members absent: Representatives Berg, Brandenburg, Meier

Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

7:10 p.m. Representative Kempenich Moved for a Do Pass.

7:10 p.m. Representative Richter Seconded the motion.

7:15 p.m. Roll call vote.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Karla Rose Hanson	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	Y
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	Y
Representative Eric J. Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon O. Nelson	Y
Representative Emily O'Brien	Y
Representative Brandy L. Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Gregory Stemen	Y

House Appropriations Committee

HB 1591

Feb. 18th 2025

Page 2

Representative Steve Swiontek	AB
Representative Scott Wagner	Y

Motion carried 22-0-1

Representative Holle will carry the bill.

7:16 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa closed the hearing.

Risa Berube, Committee Clerk

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
ENGROSSED HB 1612 ([25.1268.04000](#))**

Appropriations Committee (Rep. Vigesaa, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (22 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1612 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.

2025 SENATE HUMAN SERVICES

HB 1612

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Fort Lincoln Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
3/18/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

11:07 a.m. Chairman Lee opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Lee, Vice-Chairman Weston, Senator Van Oosting, Senator Clemens, Senator Hogan, Senator Roers.

Discussion Topics:

- Self-funding
- Consumer Protection
- Specialized Physicians
- Federal regulations
- Uplift Program

11:08 a.m. Representative London Bahl introduced the bill and submitted testimony in favor #42707.

11:28 a.m. Sky Overbo, Embedded Aviation Psychologist from University of North Dakota, testified in favor and submitted testimony #42555.

11:40 a.m. Jessica Doty, University of North Dakota, testified in favor and submitted testimony #42466.

11:51 a.m. Kyle Wanner, Executive Director of North Dakota Aeronautics Commission, testified in favor and submitted testimony #42510.

11:55 a.m. Megan Hruby testified in favor.

Additional written testimony:

Marjorie R. Jenkins, School of Medicine and Health Sciences with University of North Dakota, submitted written testimony #42297.

Tanner Overland, Chairman of North Dakota Aviation Association, submitted written testimony in favor #42527.

Justin Reisenauer, FAA Aviation Medical Examiner, submitted written testimony in favor #42588.

Faye Seidler, ND Suicide Prevention Advocate, submitted written testimony in favor #42732.

Ron Lundquist, 767 Captain for Fedex Express, submitted written testimony in favor #41764.

11:58 a.m. Chairman Lee closed the hearing.

Andrew Ficek, Committee Clerk



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE & HEALTH SCIENCES

UND.edu

Office of the Dean

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March 18, 2025

The Honorable Members of the North Dakota Legislature
State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Avenue #160
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Chair Lee and Members of the Senate Human Services,

I am writing to discuss the need for North Dakota to establish a Center for Aerospace Medicine at the University of North Dakota (UND). As envisioned, this would be a broad collaborative project between the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences (SMHS), UND Student Health Services, John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, College of Engineering and Mines's Aerospace Engineering program, and the Department of Psychology. As we continue to advance the fields of health and medicine in our state, this project presents a unique and vital opportunity to integrate aerospace medicine into SMHS's curriculum, expand support services to our aviation community, and tackle the growing concern of mental health in aviation.

North Dakota has long been a leader in pioneering solutions for the unique health challenges faced by rural and underserved populations. Our institution is poised to be a valuable partner in this initiative, as we bring our expertise in rural health and behavioral medicine to bear on the critical needs of the aerospace community. With the establishment of the proposed Center for Aerospace Medicine, we will enhance the training and resources available to medical practitioners in our state, ensuring they are well-versed in aviation regulatory medicine. This specialized training is essential not only for maintaining aviation safety but also for addressing the unique medical needs of pilots and other aviation professionals across the state.

Of particular concern is the growing issue of mental health challenges among pilots. High rates of mental illness, including depression and anxiety, are prevalent in the aviation industry. There are specific challenges that pilots face that can contribute to mental health issues, including long hours, time away from family, irregular sleep patterns, and the high-stress environment of aviation. However, a significant barrier to addressing these challenges is the stigma that exists around seeking mental health support. Many pilots fear that disclosing mental health concerns will jeopardize their careers, and this can lead to a dangerous reluctance to seek help. This initiative would help us to break down these barriers and promote a culture of mental wellness in aviation, offering pilots and aviation professionals a safe and confidential space to seek the help they need.

A key component of this initiative is the introduction of an elective 4th-year rotation in aerospace medicine through the medical program, which will offer our medical students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in this highly specialized field. By developing this rotation, we can create a pipeline of physicians who are well-equipped to serve the

growing needs of the aerospace industry, both in North Dakota and beyond. This expansion will ensure that our state remains at the forefront of training physicians capable of addressing aviation-related health challenges.

In addition, the integration of the proposed Center for Aerospace Medicine will allow us to leverage our existing clinical infrastructure across North Dakota, providing aviation medical certification services, outreach programs, and critical care support in a region that includes many rural and remote communities. By utilizing our established network, we can ensure that a rural network is developed so that individuals involved in aviation have access to necessary medical services, regardless of their location. Additionally, our Centers for Family Medicine in Bismarck and Minot provide much needed access to primary health care for the citizens of North Dakota, including mental health services.

Pilots are required to pass a specific medical examination from a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-certified licensed physician, known as an aviation medical examiner (AME), to ensure the physical and mental fit of the pilot. Specialized training and an FAA examination are needed by the licensed physician for this certification. The Centers for Family Medicine may serve as hubs for AME providers to broaden access to this specialized medical care across the state. This also provides a tremendous opportunity to better serve our state and the nation through advocating within the federal regulatory environment for physician assistants and nurse practitioners to be certified to conduct FAA medical examinations and provide further medical certifications to current and future pilots.

The proposed Center for Aerospace Medicine will not only provide essential health services but will also serve as a national model for how to integrate behavioral health into aviation medicine, helping reduce stigma and encouraging pilots to prioritize their mental health. Through UND's top ranked aerospace, aerospace engineering, medical doctor, physician assistant, nursing, psychology, and student support programs, the University is uniquely positioned to support current and future pilots across the state.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marjorie R. Jenkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marjorie" being more prominent than the last name "Jenkins".

Dr. Marjorie Jenkins

Dean, School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Vice President for Health Affairs, University of North Dakota

TESTIMONY

Jessica Doty, Director of Student Health Services, UND

HB 1612

March 18, 2025

Dear Chair Lee and Members of the Senate 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. Receiving appropriation will boost this work within the state with the goal of creating a self-sufficient Center.

I want to share with you more about the structural 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 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. UND currently has the clinical component of this initiative up and running. UND students have access to Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) physicians and HIMS AME (a specialized AME physician for substance abuse and mental health diagnosis) as well as aviation psychological assessments. Additionally, UND is poised to complete research as it relates to the aerospace medicine industry through a collaborative approach between the School of Medicine and Health Science, College of Aerospace Science, and Department of Psychology and the FAA.

Receiving state funding would allow additional hires of mental health professionals to provide services to individuals outside of the university. Additionally, we would look to support medical doctors from across the state interested in getting trained and certified as an AME or HIMS AME.

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

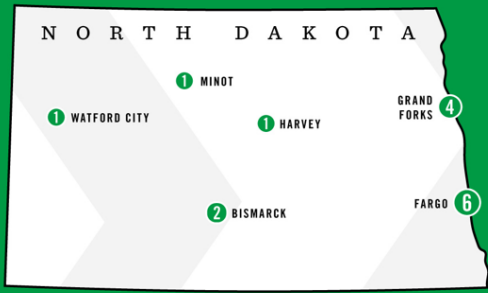
Establish educational programs for medical and behavioral health professionals across the state of North Dakota so they become aware of the needs when caring for pilots





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



March 18th, 2025

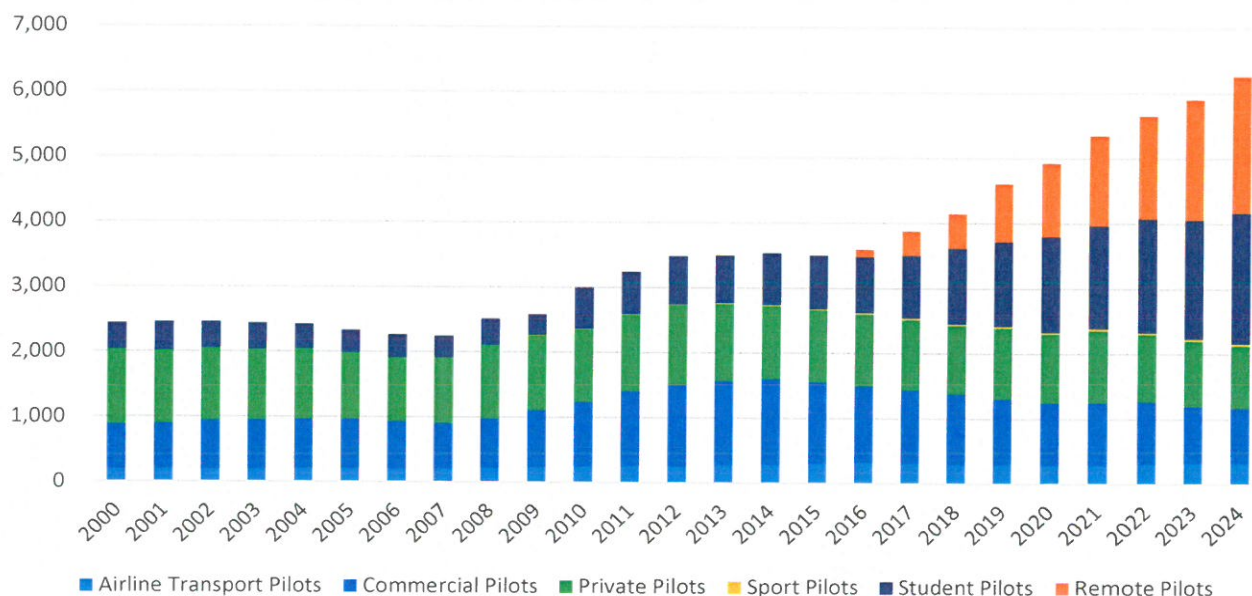
RE: Testimony to the Senate Human Services Committee – HB 1612

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



March 16, 2025

RE: Testimony to Human Services Committee – HB 1612

Chair Lee and Members of the Committee,

As Chairman of the North Dakota Aviation Association (NDAA), and member of the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 1612, which proposes the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine at the University of North Dakota (UND).

Aerospace medicine is a cornerstone of the aviation industry, safeguarding the health and performance of pilots, flight students, and aviation personnel who are vital to the success of our state's aviation sector.

UND Health at the University of North Dakota already performs nearly 1,000 aviation medical certification exams annually—our region's highest volume of such exams. This impressive figure underscores the University of North Dakota's established expertise and dedication to ensuring the safety and well-being of aviation professionals.

Moreover, the University of North Dakota is recognized globally as a world-class aviation training institution, attracting students and professionals from around the world. By leveraging this renowned reputation and deep well of expertise, House Bill 1612 would allow the University of North Dakota to further serve our state, our region, and the aviation industry as a whole by creating a Center for Aerospace Medicine.

This initiative will enhance access to critical aviation health services and solidify North Dakota's leadership in advancing aerospace medicine and supporting the aviation workforce.

To make this vision a reality, we urge the committee to support House Bill 1612, as it will:

- Provide much-needed support to ease the complicated and time-consuming special issuance medical certification process currently experienced in our region.
- Play a pivotal role in providing support, enhancing career development, and promoting safer skies for all pilots and aviation professionals by ensuring reliable access to medical certification to stay compliant with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations.
- Improve access to specialized aviation medical services, including access to Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs) and Human Intervention Motivational Study (HIMS) certified examiners, by enabling physicians to travel to underserved communities, thus ensuring our state's rural aviators receive the medical services they need to continue safely flying.
- Create a platform for aerospace and space medicine research, helping North Dakota emerge as a national leader in this field.

- Provide medical and educational support needed to meet the demands of professionals in commercial aviation, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and air traffic control.
- Serve as an educational resource for flight students, aviation workers, and the public.

Chair Lee and Members of the Committee, the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine represents a transformative opportunity for our state to address critical needs in aviation health, support the well-being of aviation professionals, and reinforce North Dakota's position as a leader in aerospace innovation. House Bill 1612 will empower the University of North Dakota to expand its exceptional track record in education and aviation medicine while providing vital resources to underserved communities and enhancing the safety and efficiency of the aviation industry. We respectfully urge your committee's support of House Bill 1612, as it is not only an investment in the future of aviation but also in the economic vitality and global recognition of North Dakota.

Sincerely,



Tanner Overland

Chairman

North Dakota Aviation Association



TESTIMONY

**Sky Overbo, Licensed Aviation Clinical Psychologist, University of
North Dakota**

President Elect of NDPA

HB 1612

March 18, 2025

Dear Chair Lee and Members of the Senate Human Services
Committee:

My name is Dr. Sky Overbo, and I am the Embedded Aviation
Psychologist at the University of North Dakota. I also am the president-
elect of the North Dakota Psychological association. **I am here today
as a licensed psychologist in support of a DO PASS vote for HB1612.**

When most people think about pilots or air traffic controllers, they think
of commercial airlines and travel. However, in North Dakota aviators are
not just transporting people to and from our great state but also are
essential in North Dakota's agricultural success. As of 2023, nearly
5,000 pilots called North Dakota home. In 2024, the North Dakota
Aeronautics Commission reported that over 1.2 million revenue-
generating passengers boarded commercial flights within the state—a
10% increase from the previous year. Additionally, between July 2023
and June 2024, North Dakota sold over 25 million gallons of taxable

aviation fuel, and a record-breaking 5.5 million acres of cropland were sprayed using aerial application. These figures highlight just a fraction of the aviation industry's significant impact on North Dakota's economy and infrastructure.

Despite its importance, the aviation profession comes with immense challenges, particularly regarding the stringent and often cumbersome FAA medical certification process. Pilots and air traffic controllers face a complex and intimidating system when dealing with health concerns, whether physical or mental. With North Dakota ranking second in the nation for pilots per capita, many will inevitably experience a health issue requiring expert guidance to navigate this process. By funding the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine, the state has the opportunity to lead the nation in aerospace medicine, offering essential clinical services, education, and research to improve aviation safety and well-being.

Unique Barriers Pilots Face Seeking Healthcare

Pilots in the United States, both recreational and commercial, must hold a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) medical certificate to operate an aircraft. These certificates are issued only by FAA-designated Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs), and depending on the pilot's certification level and age, they may be required to pass medical exams as frequently as every six months. Failure to meet FAA medical requirements results in the inability to fly, which for many pilots is not just a profession but a core part of their identity.

Unlike most individuals who can seek medical or mental health care without career consequences, pilots face significant barriers. Fear of losing their medical certification deters many from seeking treatment for anxiety, depression, or substance abuse. For example, a pilot diagnosed with anxiety who is prescribed a standard SSRI, such as Zoloft, must first discontinue flying, stabilize on the medication for a minimum of six months, and then undergo a complex FAA review process, which includes multiple psychiatric evaluations and cognitive testing and costs thousands of dollars. This is before even being considered for a special issuance medical certificate.

Pilots seeking mental health care without medication often face confusing and burdensome reporting requirements that many non-aviation mental health professionals are unfamiliar with. A key issue lies in the healthcare system's reliance on diagnostic codes for insurance reimbursement. Unfortunately, if a pilot receives a diagnosis, their therapy must be reported to the FAA—regardless of the circumstances. This means that a pilot seeking grief counseling after the loss of a loved one, simply by using their insurance, could trigger an FAA review that may temporarily ground them, creating a strong disincentive to seek the support they need. These barriers contribute to a dangerous culture where pilots avoid necessary healthcare, risking both personal well-being and flight safety.

Currently, North Dakota has severely limited access to aerospace mental health specialists, making it difficult for pilots to navigate the

FAA's medical certification process, particularly when dealing with mental health concerns. Access to psychologists and psychiatrists with expertise in aerospace medicine is exceedingly rare, and North Dakota faces a broader shortage of mental health providers overall. The state ranks 38th in the nation for mental health care providers per capita, making it even more challenging for pilots to find the specialized care they need. Until last year, North Dakota didn't have a single aviation-certified (HIMS) psychologist. Even now, the only two HIMS psychologists in the state are solely dedicated to serving UND's aviation students, leaving the nearly 5,000 pilots across North Dakota without access to essential mental health services.

If a North Dakota pilot needs psychological testing or treatment from an aviation psychologist, they have no choice but to leave the state. This lack of in-state resources forces pilots to travel hundreds of miles—often at great personal expense and with no guarantee of approval—just to seek the care they need. For many, this burden discourages them from seeking help at all, further deepening the crisis of untreated mental health issues in the aviation community.

The University of North Dakota (UND) already has a strong foundation in aerospace medicine, providing essential services to its students. UND students have access to AME physicians, HIMS AMEs, and aviation psychological assessments. Additionally, UND has the necessary infrastructure to conduct interdisciplinary research and provide aerospace medicine care beyond its campus. However, funding is

essential to extend these services to pilots, air traffic controllers, and aviation professionals across the state. With this appropriation, the Center could hire additional mental health professionals and support training for medical doctors statewide to become AMEs and HIMS AMEs, improving access to critical care.

Aviation Mental Health at UND

The importance of aviation mental health was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when UND aviation students expressed fear of seeking help due to the potential loss of their FAA medical certificates. In Spring 2021, UND convened a group of experts to address aviation mental health concerns. Tragically, in Fall 2021, the death of John Hauser reinforced the need for broader engagement. In December 2021, UND hosted the first Aviation Mental Health Summit, bringing together collegiate aviation programs, airline partners, mental health professionals, and the FAA to collaborate on solutions. This event has since become an annual Aviation Mental Health Symposium, fostering national discussions and actionable takeaways.

As a result of these efforts, UND invested over \$600,000 in strategic funding in early 2023 to build an aerospace medicine network that improves access to care for students. This investment allowed UND to expand aviation medical services, train additional HIMS AMEs, and integrate aviation psychologists into the College of Aerospace. UND's Student Health Services now employs three FAA AMEs and performs nearly 1,000 aviation medical evaluations annually. With this funding,

UND also trained additional staff to navigate FAA paperwork and ensure streamlined support for pilots seeking special issuance medical certificates. The UND Counseling Center embedded a full-time aviation psychologist and supported the training of three additional psychologists with HIMS certifications, further breaking down barriers to care.

Conclusion

With the infrastructure in place at UND, North Dakota is well-positioned to expand aerospace medicine services beyond the university and assist nearly 5,000 pilots across the state. By working with the North Dakota Aviation Association, North Dakota Aeronautics Commission, North Dakota Medical Association, and North Dakota Psychological Association, the proposed Center will create a statewide network supporting the aviation community.

The establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine represents a critical investment in the health and safety of aviation professionals. By securing funding through Bill 1612 North Dakota can lead the way in addressing the medical and mental health needs of pilots and air traffic controllers while fostering education and research that will shape the future of aerospace medicine.

I strongly urge your support for this bill, ensuring that North Dakota remains at the forefront of aviation safety and healthcare innovation. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I welcome any questions the committee may have.

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.

Human Intervention Motivation Study Psychologist (HIMS Psychologist): A FAA-designated psychologist 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.

Testimony in Support of
House Bill No. 1612
Senate Human Services Committee
March 18, 2025

Re: HB No. 1612 Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine for mental health support and certification assistance

Dear North Dakota Legislative Assembly,

I am writing this letter in support of House Bill Number 1612. From my first-hand experience as a FAA Aviation Medical Examiner, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the immense benefits this bill would provide to the state of North Dakota and pilots around the Midwest.

I provide Aviation Medical Examiner services to pilots in North Dakota and the surrounding states, helping them navigate the FAA certification process. On a monthly basis I interact with pilots who require further evaluations due to a history of mental health or substance use, if ever in their lifetime. A majority of these pilots require extensive evaluations prior to FAA Medical Certification which can take a minimum of one year, but often several years to complete before being certified to fly. It costs the pilot seeking certification thousands to tens of thousands of dollars to obtain these evaluations just for consideration of certification. Evaluations include psychiatry assessments, cognitive screening by neuropsychologists, random drug screens, multiple visits with a special Aviation Medical Examiner called a "HIMS AME", amongst other evaluations. A HIMS AME has additional training from the FAA to assist with aeromedical certification for pilots having a history of drug/substance abuse and/or psychiatric history such as attention deficit disorder, anxiety, depression, personality disorder, alcohol use disorder, prior DUI(s), marijuana abuse history, to name a few of the most common conditions requiring evaluation. A majority of pilots stop pursuing this process before ever reaching the certification decision.

The paperwork required to certify these pilots is extensive, and the number of resources needed is substantial. Due to these factors, there are very few HIMS AMEs across the country, and access for North Dakota pilots is very limited. With continuing pilot shortages, a need for proper evaluations and continued monitoring and support of pilots with prior and current psychiatric conditions and/or prior substance abuse/dependence who have achieved sobriety is necessary. Streamlining this process with all required specialists in one location would be monumental.

This bill would allow for the University of North Dakota John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences to be a cornerstone center of excellence in the pursuit of ensuring and maintaining National Airspace System safety, while supporting the pilots who function within it and those interested in contributing. By having a center with abundant resources focusing on the process by which pilots obtain mental health and substance evaluations, certification consideration times should significantly improve and more pilots would complete the evaluation process.

The University of North Dakota John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences is already known as one of the top aviation colleges in the country. House Bill Number 1612 would be instrumental in supporting their efforts to ensure pilots' mental health is as much of a priority as their aviation education.

Justin Reisenauer, MD, FACEP, AME



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Landon Bahl

District 17

701-340-7732

lbahl@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Industry, Business and Labor
Government and Veterans Affairs

Madam Chair Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services committee, good morning. It is a pleasure to be standing in front of you to introduce House Bill 1612. For the record, my name is Landon Bahl from Grand Forks, I have the pleasure of representing the great citizens of District 17 in the house.

House Bill 1612 stands up the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine. The NDCAM would be housed at The University of North Dakota under the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, and in coordination with the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. This entity will look and feel like the North Dakota Center for Rural Health and would be able to use UND Center for Family Medicine facilities across the state. Think of the NDCAM to have a very similar feeling to the Center for Rural Health. This is also why House Bill 1612 has a one-time appropriation of \$500,000. Subject matter experts firmly believe that once created, this entity will like the ND Center for Rural Health will be both self-funding and have the ability to receive federal grants. In a few short minutes, you will hear testimony from subject matter experts on exactly what this bill will do to aid in mental health issues in the aerospace industry.

The aviation industry is one of the most heavily regulated industries. It is meticulously guarded under the FAA's oversight. Yet, I must say, this relentless guarding has, for decades, resulted in profound and far-reaching negative consequences for countless lives. As a state, we may not have the power to change how the FAA conducts its business, but we *do* have the power to transform the resources and opportunities available to our aviation professionals right here in North Dakota, professionals who underpin an industry we depend on every single day, often without even realizing it. I am happy to share as I am sure others who testify after me will share it too, the news that the FAA is at the table and willing to learn from what the NDCAM will stand to do. Never has the FAA been more at the table, they are looking for North Dakota to lead the way in these efforts.

Chair & Committee, let me briefly share a quick story with you. On October 18, 2021, John Hauser, a talented young pilot, an exceptional student at UND's Aerospace School, and a young fraternity brother of mine, took off in a piper archer aircraft. This, like any other flight a student conducts is a very standard and routine training mission. Tragically, what his family, friends, and fraternity brothers did not know was that John's true mission that evening was a personal one, one that no one knew except for himself. Shortly after takeoff, outside of Grand Forks, ATC lost communication with John as he made the heartbreaking decision to take his own life doing what he so dearly loved. John wrote the following: ***"If there's anything you could do for me, get the FAA to change rules on pilots seeking help with mental health. I know it would change a lot of things for the better, and it would help a lot of people out. Love you, John."*** Those words were in a note written by John Hauser left behind for his parents. John left this earth asking us to fulfill his mission of change in the aviation industry.

I stand before you today not just as an advocate, but as someone who has seen the need for change firsthand. I have experienced the loss of losing not one, but two college fraternity brothers far too soon to suicide. Both were extraordinarily successful, deeply admired by all who knew them, and undoubtedly had bright futures

ahead as commercial aviation pilots. Sam McGuire was only 31 years old, and as you just heard, John Hauser was only 19 years old. Their losses serve as a constant reminder that mental health struggles do not discriminate, they affect even the strongest, the most accomplished, and the most resilient among us.

The pilots I speak of came to our state driven by dreams, passion, and a deep love for the aviation industry. They sought not just a career, but a lifelong journey in the skies, one filled with purpose and promise. Yet, today, we must confront an undeniable truth: the immense pressures imposed by the FAA and the industry, coupled with a lack of accessible resources, have created challenges far too heavy for many to bear.

If those burdens had been decreased, and if the right resources and support systems had been in place, I firmly believe we would not be here mourning the loss of 19-year-old John Hauser, 31-year-old Sam McGuire, and many others who shared those same dreams. Instead, they would still be with us, soaring under those same blue skies they cherished so dearly. Their absence is a call to action, a reminder that we must do better to protect the lives of those who dedicate themselves to the skies and ensure their dreams do not come at the cost of their well-being.

Attached to my testimony are some questions with answers that the House Human Services Committee had which may aid in your committee discussion.

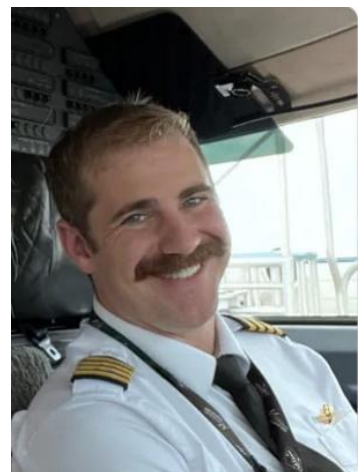
Madam Chair Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services committee, thank you for your time, and I respectfully ask this committee to put your favorable do pass recommendation on House Bill 1612. I will stand for any questions.

Regards,
Landon Bahl



Pictured left is John Hauser, a student at UND in 2021. John took his own life on October 18, 2021 while piloting a UND training plane at the young age of 19 years old. Throughout the testimony here today you will learn much more about John Hauser. John was a tremendous 19-year-old pilot who had the entire world of aviation in front of him. Mental health and the worries of seeking help due to the FAA and how that would play out with his future played a big role in his decision to end his young life. Pictured right is another brother, Sam McGuire, an alumnus of UND, who at the time was working for Southwest Airlines and I believe had just gotten on as a pilot with Delta Airlines. Many would say that Sam had the best

life, new job with one of the best airline carriers, a beautiful girlfriend whom he was soon going to propose to, a house, and some of the best friends that cared deeply about him. What more could you ask for? Unfortunately, deep down, Sam was asking for so much more, but no one knew. The burden of mental health became too much for Sam, and he unfortunately took his own life on August 18, 2023, at the age of 31 years old.



HB 1612

The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine

- **Is UND already doing what this bill plans to do for the entire state?**

Yes, UND currently has the clinical component of this initiative up and running. UND students have access to Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) physicians and HIMS AME (specialized AME physician for substance abuse and mental health diagnosis) as well as aviation psychological assessments. Additionally, UND is poised to complete research as it relates to the aerospace medicine industry through a collaborative approach between the School of Medicine and Health Science, College of Aerospace Science, and Department of Psychology.

- **What type of credentials will employees have that are working at the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine?**

Employees will be medical and psychological professionals at UND who already hold the credentials to complete this work. Many of them are hired as UND employees, and a portion of their current work encompasses the aerospace medicine focus already.

The funding received through the state would allow us to hire additional mental health professionals to provide services to individuals outside of the university. We would also look to support medical doctors from across the state interested in getting trained and certified as an AME or HIMS AME.

- What will the \$500,000 appropriation be used for?

University of North Dakota			
ND Center for Aerospace Medicine			
Period of Performance: 7/1/25-6/30/27			
	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Salary Detail			
Salary			
Aviation Psychology Post Doc	57,000	59,280	116,280
Master's Level Clinician	60,000	62,400	122,400
Experimental Psychology PhD GRA	25,000	25,500	50,500
Total Salary	142,000	147,180	289,180
Fringe Benefit	62,680	65,182	127,862
Total Salary/Fringe	\$204,680	\$212,362	\$417,042
Travel for out reach and education	30,320	25,638	55,958
Professional Development Training	15,000	12,000	27,000
Total Other Direct Costs	\$45,320	\$37,638	\$82,958
Total Direct Costs	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000
Facilities & Administration (IDC)	0	0	0
Total Budget	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000

- If the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine gets stood up, how will the execution of this work occur across the state?

Currently, our plan would be to utilize the existing clinic space operated in both Minot and Bismarck as part of the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences, along with our existing clinical space on the UND campus in Grand Forks. Virtual training opportunities may also be a venue to educate the state through professional organizations and medical facilities.

- **How many resources would this center be sharing with UND?**

Most of the resources of this center would be shared with UND. The state dollars would support new hires in the realm of aviation psychology and clinical support so that we can expand those services across the state of North Dakota. The partnership with the School of Medicine and Health Sciences with medical residency clinics in Bismarck, ND and Minot, ND allow greater this Center to expand beyond the Grand Forks campus and serve the entire state.

- **How fast could this center get enacted and actually start seeing patients?**

Pilots and controllers have immediate access to medical providers such as AME's and HIMS AME's. The services and processes currently exist for medical certification physicals, HIMS services, aerospace consults. Access to psychological assessments are available for UND students currently, and could be stood up for non-students quickly.

- **This is a one time \$500,000 appropriation. The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would stand on it's own after getting it started. How certain is the ability to receive federal grants to ensure the center continues across the state well beyond when these initial funds run out?**

The one-time funding would support a kick-start to this Center. The goal would be that increased patient load will provide revenue, research proposals would support the Center as self-sustaining after the initial funds. There would not be federal dollars to support these newly added mental health professionals.

As a reminder, the medical and psychological services provided have fees assessed and paid by the pilots. With the jump start of appropriated funding, the Center have time to build up the client base to support into the future for all pilots within the state.

- **If a pilot shares something with an AME, would the pilot get grounded immediately?**

Yes, pilots are trained to know when to report and self-ground if there are issues. While there may be some delay in hearing from the FAA, pilots hold the ethical obligation to ground themselves in certain situations. There are serious consequences if a pilot withholds information or provides false information to the FAA during the Aviation Medical Certification process. This is the reason why many pilots simply do not seek the healthcare that they may need.

- **With recent plane crashes, will the FAA lower its guidelines?**

These issues with mental health are unrelated to the current crash discussions. The Center of Aerospace Medicine is interested in working with the FAA to learn about how to safely reduce barriers and stigma related to mental health. Determining if a pilot is “fit to fly” is not a black and white answer as the current FAA regulations imply.

- **What the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine would do once established, is this happening already within UND?**

Yes, some of this work is currently happening at UND. The Center, with support from the state, would work to expand the reach and knowledge in this area across the state. Some examples may be providing professional development to other medical professionals and psychologists in the state as it relates to aerospace medicine and FAA regulations and processes. Additionally, an example may be providing a support network of AME physicians in all areas of the state to ensure access is wide-spread.

- **The FAA supports the entire mission behind the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine?**

The FAA has been a close partner to UND and is aware of this legislation. They recently visited the UND campus and toured the College of Aerospace and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences. They were overly impressed with what they saw and discussed during their time on the UND campus. UND and North Dakota is uniquely positioned to be impactful players in this conversation and finding solutions to rural access to Aerospace Medicine.

- **Provide detail on the exact services that employees of the Center would provide to pilots?**

The requested funding for the Center would support amplifying the current mental health resources available to pilots across North Dakota. This funding would go in support of hiring additional psychological staff to provide FAA required psychological assessments to pilots, create training opportunities for psychology professionals throughout the state, and enhance research partnerships with the FAA to determine safe and supportive requirements for pilots surrounding mental health concerns.

- **If a pilot has their medical revoked, does the center for aerospace medicine help get pilots back on track to get their medical back as soon as they can? Is this already happening at UND?**

Yes, if a pilot gets their medical certificate "revoked" they would be able to reach out to UND Student Health Service through available HIMS AME services. This support would enhance the ability to have a one-stop-shop for the state with aerospace physicians and psychologists in the same location to support the pilot through the issues they are facing. This is an extraordinarily complex process, so having the expertise available to assist pilots and breakdown the barrier of seeking care is important.

**Senate Human Service Committee
March 18th, 2025 HB 1612
Testimony in Opposition**

Dear Chair Lee and the members of the Senate Human Service Committee,

I urge a "Do Pass" on HB 1612.

It is an absolute joy to support this bill. After submitting testimony on so many bills that I found particularly scary for mental health or public health, this is a bright spot in my day. I'm a suicide prevention advocate and work across the state to connect people to resources.

I do not know the rigors of being a pilot, but a friend of mine who lives in Grand Forks told me about the experience of a loss they had there. They told me about how much this bill mattered to them. And they knew my work was in suicide prevention and encouraged me to share this out.

What I know is that many licensed professionals or active service military are expected to be in good mental health. In practice, this often means when they are struggling with mental health they try to hide or minimize the problems they're having until it is too late. Because to be honest with their struggles may mean losing their job and from that their livelihood and home. Our systems need to be more flexible and more realistic resources need to be offered, because while I understand the logic that enforces the strict mental health need, these restrictions don't serve us well. They have the opposite effect and put more people in danger.

I don't know the particulars of this bill, as it isn't the usual population I serve in my work, but I think the issues here mirror the issues my professionals I work with have. And I strongly encourage any effort that increases access to mental health, support, and hope. I love that this bill exists and I love that we're working to help our pilots out. For these reason and on behalf of my friend in Grand Forks, I urge a "Do Pass"

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state,
Faye Seidler

Testimony for HB 1612

Mr. Chairman and members of the human services committee,

For the record, my name is Ron Lundquist and I am a 767 Captain for Fedex Express. I am a proud alumnus of UND, citizen of District 22 and reside in Kindred ND. I am submitting my support of HB 1612 which will seek to establish a Center for Aerospace Medicine at the University of North Dakota.

In addition to my flight duties at Fedex, I volunteer for the Critical Incident Response Program (CIRP) under the Airline Pilots Association (ALPA). Our committee's mission is to lessen the psychological impact of on-the-job accidents or incidents on crew members and their families. We also assist individuals dealing with traumatic events outside of aviation—such as personal losses or severe accidents—we focus on facilitating recovery to minimize the risk of harmful stress responses that can adversely affect job performance, careers, families, and overall health. While my colleagues and I are not mental health professionals, we have undergone peer support training with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed firsthand the critical importance of addressing mental health issues early, particularly within the aviation sector. Pilots and aerospace professionals view their careers as sacred, and the mere mention of "mental health" often triggers feelings of fear and anxiety about potential career repercussions. This fear can deter individuals from seeking the help they need, ultimately jeopardizing their well-being and safety. Something they've worked so hard for, saved for and committed their life to might be gone in an instant.

During COVID, passenger airlines were all but shut down. Cargo airlines, such as mine, flew incredibly demanding schedules. More time away from families, putting themselves at risk as they flew to virtually every corner of the world. Our crews that primarily flew international (and many domestically) were literally locked in their hotel rooms on layovers for days on end. I saw it take a toll on their (and other carriers' pilots) mental well being. Some suffered to the point where they took leave of absences. Some ultimately took their own lives. This was vastly underreported or not reported at all. Imagine if they knew that getting help wouldn't end their career? Imagine if they knew there were Aviation Medical Examiners (AME's) that were trained to deal with and had resources for these sorts of issues so they could continue their career? And imagine if they were aware of this from early on, BEFORE they started their career.

I have seen many changes in my 29 year airline career. Some good. Some not. HB 1612 and the establishment of the Center for Aerospace Medicine would be a monumental industry change. A good change! Hopefully you realize how this might affect not only the aerospace industry in North Dakota but the country as well. It won't be easy, worthwhile things most often aren't but it's a great start to addressing a problem we've had in aviation for far too long. UND is so well respected nationally and internationally as a leader in aerospace. I would fully expect other schools and ultimately the FAA to look to our blueprint on addressing mental health in aviation.

I humbly ask that you give your full support to HB 1612.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ron Lundquist
Kindred ND
B767 Capt. Fedex Express
rplundquist@gmail.com

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Fort Lincoln Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
3/24/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

9:20 a.m. Chairman Lee opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Lee, Vice-Chairman Weston, Senator Van Oosting, Senator Clemens, Senator Hogan, Senator Roers.

Discussion Topics:

- Historical Protocols
- National Public Policy Development

9:25 a.m. Senator Hogan moved Do Pass and Rerefer to Appropriations

9:25 a.m. Senator Roers seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Judy Lee	Y
Senator Kent Weston	Y
Senator David A. Clemens	N
Senator Kathy Hogan	Y
Senator Kristin Roers	Y
Senator Desiree Van Oosting	Y

Motion Passed 5-1-0.

Senator Roers will carry the bill.

9:25 a.m. Chairman Lee closed the hearing.

Andrew Ficek, Committee Clerk

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
ENGROSSED HB 1612 ([25.1268.04000](#))**

Human Services Committee (Sen. Lee, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** and **BE REREFERRED** to the **Appropriations Committee** (5 YEAS, 1 NAY, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1612 was rereferred to the **Appropriations Committee**. This bill does not affect workforce development.

2025 SENATE APPROPRIATIONS

HB 1612

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations - Human Resources Division Harvest Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
4/7/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation

3:03 p.m. Chairman Dever opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Dever and Senators Cleary, Davison, Magrum and Mathern.

Discussion Topics:

- Establishment of ND Center for Aerospace Medicine

3:04 p.m. Senator Landon Bahl, District 17, introduced the bill and testified in favor.

3:11 p.m. Peter Johnson, UND Spokeperson, testified in favor.

3:14 p.m. Chairman Dever closed the hearing.

Joan Bares, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations - Human Resources Division Harvest Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
4/8/2025

Relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation

9:52 a.m. Chairman Dever opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Dever and Senators Cleary, Davison, Magrum and Mathern.

Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

9:52 a.m. Senator Mathern started discussion regarding mental health services for pilots.

9:56 a.m. Senator Cleary moved Do Not Pass.

9:56 a.m. Senator Magrum seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	A
Senator Jeffrey J. Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	N

Motion Passed 3-1-1.

Senator Cleary will carry the bill.

9:58 a.m. Chairman Dever closed the hearing.

Joan Bares, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations - Human Resources Division Harvest Room, State Capitol

HB 1612 p.m.
4/9/2025

Related to Health and Human Services.

3:06 p.m. Chairman Dever opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Dever and Senators Cleary, Davison, Magrum and Mathern.

Discussion Topics

- Committee Action

3:06 p.m. Senator Cleary moved to Reconsider Bill HB 1612.

3:07 p.m. Senator Davison seconded the motion.

Voice Vote - Motion passed

3:08 p.m. Senator Cleary moved amendment to reduce funding from \$500,000 in the general fund to \$250,000, in the one-time funding Community Health Trust Fund and to find authorization to find other sources for the other quarter of million dollars.

3:09 p.m. Senator Mathern seconded the motion.

Voice Vote - Motion passed

3:11 p.m. Senator Cleary moved Do Pass as Amended.

3:11 p.m. Senator Mathern seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	N
Senator Jeffrey J. Magrum	N
Senator Tim Mathern	Y

Motion passed 3-2-0.

Senator Cleary will carry the bill.

3:13 p.m. Chairman Dever closed the hearing.

Joan Bares, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Harvest Room, State Capitol

HB 1612
4/10/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

9:24 a.m. Chairman Bekkedahl opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Bekkedahl, Vice-Chairman Erbele, and Senators Burckhard, Cleary, Conley, Davison, Dever, Dwyer, Magrum, Mathern, Meyer, Schaible, Sickler, Sorvaag, Thomas, Wanzek.

Discussion Topics:

- Funding Sources
- One Time Funding
- Behavioral Health Issues
- Extended Services

9:24 a.m. Senator Cleary introduced the bill and submitted testimony #44889.

9:26 a.m. Senator Cleary moved amendment LC 25.1268.04001.

9:26 a.m. Senator Davison seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Randy A. Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	Y
Senator Jeffery J. Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	N
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul J. Thomas	A
Senator Terry M. Wanzek	Y

Motion Passed 14-1-1.

9:38 a.m. Senator Mathern moved to further amend by making it a one-time appropriation.

9:38 a.m. Senator Magrum seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Randy A. Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	Y
Senator Jeffery J. Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul J. Thomas	Y
Senator Terry M. Wanzek	Y

Motion Passed 16-0-0.

9:39 a.m. Senator Cleary moved a Do Pass as Amended.

9:39 a.m. Senator Dever seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Robert Erbele	N
Senator Randy A. Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	N
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	Y
Senator Jeffery J. Magrum	N
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	N
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	N
Senator Paul J. Thomas	Y
Senator Terry M. Wanzek	Y

Motion Passed 11-5-0.

Senator Roers will carry the bill.

9:41 a.m. Chairman Bekkedahl adjourned the meeting.

Elizabeth Reiten, Committee Clerk

25.1268.04002
Title.05000
Fiscal No. 1

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Senate Appropriations
Committee

April 10, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO
FIRST ENGROSSMENT**

ENGROSSED HOUSE BILL NO. 1612

Introduced by

Representatives Bahl, K. Anderson, O'Brien, Schreiber-Beck, Stemen

Senators Axtman, Cory, Meyer

CO
4/10/25
1 of 3

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, relating to the establishment of the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine
3 for mental health support and certification assistance; and to provide an appropriation.

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

5 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
6 and enacted as follows:

7 **North Dakota center for aerospace medicine.**

8 1. The university of North Dakota with the school of medicine and health sciences shall
9 establish the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine under the John D. Odegard
10 school of aerospace sciences.

11 2. The North Dakota center for aerospace medicine shall:

12 a. Provide mental health resources and assistance to obtain medical certification
13 from the federal aviation administration to flight students, pilots, and aviation
14 professionals in the fields of commercial aviation, unmanned aircraft systems,
15 and air traffic control;

16 b. Cooperate with the federal aviation administration office of aerospace medicine;

17 c. Support access, including rural access, to mental health resources, aviation
18 medical examiners, and human intervention motivational study aviation medical
19 examiners;

1 d. Provide support to assist aviation medical examiners, human intervention
2 motivational study aviation medical examiners, and applicants with federal
3 aviation administration requirements;

4 e. Facilitate collaboration between research initiatives across the state related to
5 aviation and space medicine; and

6 f. Provide mental health education and outreach.

7 **SECTION 2. APPROPRIATION - UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA - NORTH DAKOTA**

8 **CENTER FOR AEROSPACE MEDICINE - ONE-TIME FUNDING.** There is appropriated out of
9 any moneys in the ~~general fund~~ community health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise
10 appropriated, the sum of ~~\$500,000~~ \$250,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, and
11 from other funds derived from federal funds or other sources, the sum of \$250,000, or so much
12 of the sum as may be necessary. to the university of North Dakota for the purpose of planning,
13 developing, establishing, and operating the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine,
14 including personnel recruitment and salaries, facility and assessment material costs,
15 professional development and training, education and outreach, and initial research funding, for
16 the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027. The appropriation provided in
17 this section is considered a one-time funding item.

30f3

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT:**House Bill No. 1612 - University of North Dakota - Senate Action**

	Base Budget	House Version	Senate Changes	Senate Version
Center for aerospace medicine		\$500,000		\$500,000
Total all funds	\$0	\$500,000	\$0	\$500,000
Less estimated income	0	0	500,000	500,000
General fund	\$0	\$500,000	(\$500,000)	\$0
FTE	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Department 230 - University of North Dakota - Detail of Senate Changes

	Adjusts Funding for Center for Aerospace ¹	Total Senate Changes
Total all funds	\$0	\$0
Less estimated income	0	0
General fund	\$0	\$0
FTE	0.00	0.00

¹ Funding for a University of North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine is adjusted from \$500,000 from the general fund to \$250,000 from the community health trust fund and \$250,000 from federal funds. This funding is considered a one-time funding item.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
ENGROSSED HB 1612**

Appropriations Committee (Sen. Bekkedahl, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.1268.04002](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (11 YEAS, 5 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). Engrossed HB 1612 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

25.1268.04001
Title.

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Senate Appropriations - Human
Resources Division Committee
April 9, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO
FIRST ENGROSSMENT**

ENGROSSED HOUSE BILL NO. 1612

Introduced by

Representatives Bahl, K. Anderson, O'Brien, Schreiber-Beck, Stemen

Senators Axtman, Cory, Meyer

- 1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15-11 of the North Dakota
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- 1 d. Provide support to assist aviation medical examiners, human intervention
- 2 motivational study aviation medical examiners, and applicants with federal
- 3 aviation administration requirements;
- 4 e. Facilitate collaboration between research initiatives across the state related to
- 5 aviation and space medicine; and
- 6 f. Provide mental health education and outreach.

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8 **CENTER FOR AEROSPACE MEDICINE.** There is appropriated out of any moneys in the
9 ~~general fund~~community health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the
10 sum of ~~\$500,000~~\$250,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, and from other funds
11 derived from federal funds or other sources, the sum of \$250,000, or so much of the sum as
12 may be necessary. to the university of North Dakota for the purpose of planning, developing,
13 establishing, and operating the North Dakota center for aerospace medicine, including
14 personnel recruitment and salaries, facility and assessment material costs, professional
15 development and training, education and outreach, and initial research funding, for the
16 biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.