

Mental Health in Aviation Act

Senator John Hoeven (R-ND) & Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)

The Mental Health in Aviation Act improves aviation safety and makes our skies safer by ensuring pilots and air traffic controllers can access mental health care without fear of professional repercussions. The Act reduces bureaucratic delays and overregulation that can create a dangerous culture of silence and stigma. Under current FAA regulations, aviation professionals are required to disclose mental health treatment. Once disclosed, however, they can face prolonged uncertainty, delays, and sweeping regulations to maintain their medical certification that can sideline even those with minor or well-managed conditions. As well, the FAA has very limited psychiatric staff to handle all pilot mental health evaluations, resulting in a significant backlog of special issuance applications.

In recognition of these challenges, the FAA convened the Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) in 2023 to evaluate existing policies and identify reforms. The ARC delivered 24 targeted recommendations aimed at removing unnecessary obstacles to care while upholding safety standards. The Mental Health in Aviation Act builds on these recommendations to modernize the FAA's approach, promote early intervention, and support the well-being of aviation professionals.

The Mental Health in Aviation Act requires the FAA to take the following steps:

Modernize Mental Health Regulations for Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers

- Directs the FAA to revise regulations based on recommendations from the FAA's mental health task group that was established in the FAA Reauthorization of 2024 to encourage early disclosure and treatment of mental health conditions without fear of losing one's career.
- Requires the FAA to consult with a broad range of stakeholders, including academic institutions conducting aviation training and mental health professionals, to ensure that future policies reflect current clinical standards and aviation workforce realities.

Annual Review of Mental Health Special Issuance Process

- Requires the FAA to annually review and update processes related to the special issuance process for FAA medical certificates for pilots and air traffic controllers.
- Requires the FAA to annually review the classification and use of medications, and to improve mental health knowledge and training provided to Aviation Medical Examiners.

Improving Capacity for the FAA Office of Aerospace Medicine

- Allocates \$15 million annually (FY2026–FY2029) to recruit and train additional aviation medical examiners (AMEs) and human intervention motivation study (HIMS) trained AME's, including psychiatrists, to increase oversight and process certification reviews more efficiently.

Public Information Campaign

- Allocates \$1.5 million annually (FY2026–FY2029) for a public information campaign to reduce the stigma around mental health care in aviation, and to encourage pilots and air traffic controllers to seek necessary mental health treatment.

Industry Support: Airlines for America (A4A), Regional Airline Association (RAA), Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA), National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS), the National Flight Training Alliance, the NetJets Association of Shared Aircraft Pilots (NJASAP), Southwest Airlines Pilots Association (SWAPA), the Allied Pilots Association (APA), the Coalition of Airline Pilots (CAPA), and the Pilots Mental Health Campaign (PMHC).