

Congress Must Reform Mental Health Care for Airline Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers

For far too long, aviation professionals have faced a difficult choice between seeking necessary mental health care and maintaining their careers. The current FAA regulatory framework creates a punitive culture that forces pilots and air traffic controllers to risk their livelihoods when seeking professional help. This outdated approach not only harms individuals but also undermines the safety standards of trust and collaboration that the U.S. aviation system is built upon.

Professional pilots and air traffic controllers must undergo thorough vetting and medical exams throughout their careers to maintain their medical certification. The FAA enforces medical standards to mitigate the risk of in-flight medical emergencies and ensure that aviation professionals are fit for duty, as safety must always remain the top priority for aviation. For decades, disclosing a mental health condition essentially precluded aviation safety professionals from working. Under the current rules, these professionals who seek help for mental health conditions are treated on a case-by-case basis, whereby they may apply for a special issuance medical certificate if they can prove that the treated condition is well-controlled and unlikely to impact flight safety. This review and special issuance involve additional testing and documentation from medical professionals and can result in lengthy delays and backlogs, sometimes as long as 18 months. During this time, careers and livelihoods are put in jeopardy. This contributes to a culture of fear and silence surrounding mental health issues and can create a reluctance to seek treatment.

In December 2023, the FAA recognized the need to reform its current policies and established the Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances Aviation Rulemaking Committee (“Mental Health ARC” or the “ARC”) to identify barriers to mental health care for aviators and controllers and present recommendations to the FAA to address these challenges. In April 2024, the Mental Health ARC released 24 consensus recommendations aimed at reducing barriers to care, improving the aeromedical review process, and enhancing aviation safety.

On April 2nd, 2025, the bipartisan Mental Health in Aviation Act (H.R. 2591) was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by lead sponsor Rep. Sean Casten (D-IL), co-lead Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN), and original cosponsors Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA), and Rep. Tracey Mann (R-KS). The bill would address these longstanding issues while maintaining aviation safety as its paramount concern. Specifically, the bill would require the FAA to implement the Mental Health ARC recommendations within two years to the greatest extent practicable. The legislation also requires the FAA to annually review and update mental health-related review processes and authorizes additional funding for these efforts, as well as the hiring and training of additional medical staff and Aviation Medical Examiners. This would eliminate some of these barriers to

mental health care, improve access to care, and expedite the return-to-work process for aviation safety professionals.

TTD strongly supports the Mental Health in Aviation Act, which was reported favorably by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on June 11th, 2025, and urges Congress to pass and send the legislation to the President's desk without delay. Passing this bill into law would ensure that these highly trained professionals can maintain their health and continue to serve our nation, thereby ensuring their well-being and the safety of the flying public.

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