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## **BILL TO EXPAND SUCCESSFUL SPORT PILOT RULE ON MEDICAL CERTIFICATION FOR GENERAL AVIATION PILOTS**

**ISSUE & BACKGROUND:** The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) medical certification system has evolved into an overly burdensome and costly one which has questionable, if any, benefit to general aviation (GA) pilots. Aeromedical safety has improved because pilots properly assess their physical fitness to fly, prior to each flight.

Today, the FAA issues three classes of medical certificates – First, Second, and Third. First and Second Class medical certificates are for commercial purposes with the Third Class used primarily for recreational aviation. The FAA Third Class medical certificate cannot be used for commercial purposes.

In addition to holding a pilot's license which requires rigorous training, a pilot must also be examined by an FAA-designated Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) and obtain a medical certificate in order to fly an aircraft. This exam includes an evaluation of weight, height, ability to see, ability to hear, and a measure of blood pressure, to name a few. During the remaining period the medical certificate is valid (every two to five years depending on age) the pilot is responsible for determining their own fitness to fly.

Due to the significant cost associated with obtaining a medical certificate, renewing it, the fear of being denied and sent through the bureaucratic hoops and extensive testing required to get it back, many pilots have chosen to stop flying – no longer participating and enjoying the freedom to fly. However, the FAA recognized this and in 2004 adopted the Sport Pilot rule, enabling pilots to fly many types of small, light aircraft without a third class medical certificate.

**LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE:** Congressmen Todd Rokita (R-4th-IN), Sam Graves (R-6th-MO), and Collin Peterson (D-7<sup>th</sup>-MN) introduced a bill (HR 3708) that expands upon the FAA's highly-successful Sport Pilot rule to slightly larger aircraft, but under limited conditions and would enable thousands of able-bodied pilots to return or remain a part of the GA community. An identical bill (S. 2103) has been introduced in the Senate by Senators John Boozman (R-AR), Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Pat Roberts (R-KS) and also has bipartisan support.

**BILL SUMMARY:** The bill allows a person with a valid pilot's license to operate as pilot in command of a small aircraft (up to 6 seats and 6000 pounds) without regard to a third class medical certificate, so long as they are: (1) not operating the flight for-hire; (2) operating under visual flight rules (VFR); (3) below a median sea level altitude of 14,000 feet; and (4) not flying at a speed in excess of 250 knots.

**AOPA POSITION:** The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), the world's largest aviation association, fully supports the bill which will expand upon the FAA's successful Sport Pilot rule, and is a top priority to our members. The bill is designed to ensure the current level of safety is maintained while significantly reducing burdensome regulatory barriers. The bill provides the FAA and GA community with a responsible and appropriate approach to addressing medical fitness for pilots who are flying covered aircraft for private and recreational purposes.

**SAFETY:** Pilots would still be required to assess their own fitness to fly, just as they are today. In addition, all private pilots would still be required to undergo a flight review, conducted by a certificated flight instructor at least every two years in order to act as pilot in command. During these biennial flight reviews, instructors

will continue to evaluate each pilot's cognitive condition, as well as his or her physical ability to safely operate an aircraft. If either is in question they will not endorse the pilot. In addition, the resources now being used on the FAA medical certification process could be reinvested in ways that do far more to enhance safety, including increased proficiency flying and installing new safety equipment on aircraft. Pilots value their own safety and that of their passengers which will continue to be true with or without the third-class medical requirement.

**EDUCATION:** To ensure that pilots continue to have the information needed to self-assess their fitness to fly and to maintain the current and profound emphasis on safety AOPA is developing a comprehensive online education course to educate pilots further with this information. This training will be free to the public. Currently, the FAA does not provide pilots with the educational tools to properly self-assess their medical fitness to fly. Coupled with an open and honest relationship with one's primary care doctor, training will enhance aviation safety and support the elimination for FAA medical certification for GA pilots operating covered aircraft.

**COST SAVINGS BY REDUCTION OF UNNECESSARY BURDENS:** The bill will reduce the current barriers to medical certification in a manner that allows for the continued safe operation and provides a cost savings to both the FAA and industry. In 2006, the FAA estimated the cost to a pilot for a medical exam to be \$321. Adjusted only for inflation, today's average cost to a pilot for a medical exam is \$371. In 2012, the FAA conducted a total of 382,198 medical exams. Using these figures, pilots spent more than \$140 million in 2012 alone to obtain a FAA medical certificate. A conservative estimate also shows a savings of more than \$11 million to the FAA over 10 years.

**OTHER BENEFITS:** General aviation supports over 1.2 million jobs and more than \$150 billion in economic activity annually, yet the cost of flying can be a challenge which impacts the GA community as a whole. The bill will not only save pilots millions of dollars but will also help reverse the decline in the pilot population which is incredibly important since we have lost 6,000 pilots per year and 60,000 over a decade. In addition, getting more pilots flying will also lead to building more airplanes, creating new jobs, and growing the economy.

**CONCLUSION:** AOPA fully supports this bill. Correcting regulatory requirements for medical certification on private and recreational pilots is necessary to guarantee the long-term viability, sustainability and economic growth of general aviation.