



## AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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June 12, 2007

The Honorable Henry M. Michaux, Jr., Senior Chairman  
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Rick Glazier, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Marion N. McLawhorn, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Ray Rapp, Co-Chair  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

The Honorable Beverly M. Earle, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Bob England, M.D., Co-Chair  
The Honorable Verla Insko, Co-Chair  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

North Carolina House of Representatives  
Legislative Building  
16 West Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601

RE: Hearing on Planned Closing of Horace Williams Airport

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The closing of Horace Williams Airport has been a matter of some concern throughout North Carolina. For several years, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), on behalf of its more than 10,000 members in North Carolina, and 412,000 members nationwide have been working to protect this important airport.

Horace Williams Airport is a vital access point to North Carolina and the region's air transportation system. Properly supported, it would be an invaluable asset to the Chapel Hill economy and community. Nonetheless, the owner and operator of the airport, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has announced its intention to close the airport as part of developing a research park called Carolina North. AOPA has worked since that time to educate university and state officials on the importance of preserving this airport, and has fought in the legislature to keep the airport open.

In addition to being a vital part of North Carolina's transportation system, the airport plays a critical role in supporting the mission of the University of North Carolina's Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) program by transporting specialist physicians from UNC School of Medicine to rural communities across North Carolina. Many physicians and local officials are concerned that the proposed closure of the airport will make the AHEC mission even more

difficult. Operations at Horace Williams Airport are crucial to the ongoing success of the AHEC program. UNC's pediatric program alone uses Horace Williams over 100 times a year to transport specialty cardiologists to treat children in rural areas, services that would otherwise be unavailable.

While some have argued that UNC-Chapel Hill's proposed Carolina North development requires the closure of the airport, this is not a unanimously held belief. It is important to note that the initial plans for Carolina North included the airport as part of the development. The original planners apparently understood that the presence of an airport will enhance the attractiveness of Carolina North to biotechnology and other corporate partners, while also retaining the essential transportation infrastructure necessary to support the medical school's rural health care outreach efforts. This has certainly been the experience at other universities adjacent to a small airport.

Before the University takes any irrevocable action in closing this important access point to aviation, it is vital that all of the interests involved be carefully weighed at the highest level. Although the General Assembly has twice voted to study how the closure of Horace Williams Airport will affect access to AHEC physician services, no such joint study has been conducted, and your hearing is the first significant effort to understand these issues. Additionally, in 2004 the legislature required that a replacement airport within 10-15 minutes' drive of the UNC campus be open and operating before closing Horace Williams. At the very least, we suggest the General Assembly reiterate this position and require such a replacement.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Our pledge is to work with you to find a practical solution to this issue that protects the public health and the state's transportation system, while allowing UNC to pursue its goals for Carolina North.

Very truly yours,



Gregory Pecoraro  
Vice President, Regional Affairs

cc: B. Davis Horne, Esq.  
Mr. Bob Minter, AOPA Southeast Regional Representative