



PASS Participates in Mental Health & Aviation Summit

Last week, PASS National President David Spero participated in a summit held by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) entitled “Navigating Mental Health in Aviation.” The summit, hosted by NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy, featured two panels in the morning: one on first person accounts of navigating the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)’s approach to mental health; the second featured FAA officials and mental health care providers. President Spero was part of the afternoon roundtable with other aviation labor leaders on [“The Future of Mental Health: Where Do We Go From Here?”](#)

He noted that the FAA recently established the [Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances Rulemaking Committee \(ARC\)](#)” and in advocating for PASS participation on that committee, President Spero said, “We represent aviation safety inspectors who create policy on these issues, they investigate accidents and incidents, and they educate the public.” Their expertise and experience will prove valuable to the ARC. But, Spero continued, “there’s got to be some things that happen now to get through the bureaucracy that we’re dealing with at the FAA.”

There was discussion of a voluntary safety reporting program that would allow employees to self-report a mental health diagnosis but “people have to feel free [to report], that they are not going to be penalized and don’t have to disclose every little thing that has happened to them that has nothing to do with the assessment” of their mental health fitness, Spero continued.

Earlier in the day, [PASS member Tim Sisk](#), a pilot with three decades of experience and an FAA aviation safety inspector, recounted his now 21-month journey navigating the agency’s bureaucracy regarding his mental health status. In March of 2022, Sisk went in for a routine medical exam to remain medically certified to fly. “I left with a deferral instead of a medical certificate. That turned into a denial,” said Sisk, “Because I was taking a medication [for a mental health condition] that has been FDA-approved for 40 years and had no side effects.”

Despite submitting 297 pages of medical records to the FAA, the agency has asked him for more records, including from the Veterans Administration. “I’m not a veteran,” he told the summit. “The FAA must revise its policies for pilots with mental health diagnoses. It must use modern data and take a proactive role in supporting mental health care while removing the unnecessary barriers to pilots with mental health diagnosis.”

Spero reiterated some of Sisk’s story later in the day to the roundtable, that Sisk had not faced the issue with his medical certification before. “Look at the resources getting thrown at that, how much time and effort is being put into that by the agency,” he said. “Let’s look at what the real issues are and focus on how to encourage people to come forward.”

This will be an ongoing discussion within the aviation community and PASS will remain actively involved.