

Talking Points Opposing MN House Bill HF 3916

“Use of a transponder in aircraft flight required” – requiring operable and activated transponders on all aircraft in Minnesota navigable airspace

State overreach into federally preempted aviation regulation

Aviation equipment standards and airspace operations are exclusively governed by the FAA under federal law (49 U.S.C. § 40103 and 14 CFR Part 91). Minnesota cannot impose its own blanket equipment mandate on aircraft operating in national airspace without conflicting with federal uniformity requirements.

Completely redundant with existing federal rules

FAA regulations (14 CFR § 91.215) already require transponders in all controlled airspace (Class A, B, C) and above 10,000 feet MSL. This is the airspace in and around metro areas in Minnesota.

Will NOT make aircraft visible on public tracking applications

The bill explicitly requires only a transponder “that automatically transmits responses to air traffic control radar interrogation.” Public apps like Flightradar24, ADS-B Exchange, and FlightAware rely on ADS-B Out broadcasts (GPS position data). Standard Mode A/C or basic Mode S transponders do not broadcast position publicly — aircraft will remain invisible to these platforms and the general public. Any claim that the bill improves “visibility” or public tracking is false.

Huge financial burden on Minnesota pilots and general aviation

Retrofitting or certifying a transponder costs thousands of dollars per aircraft plus recurring maintenance and inspections. This will ground or deter many small planes, ultralights, gliders, and flight-training aircraft — especially in rural areas — harming flight schools, airports, airshows, and the state’s aviation economy.

Narrow, impractical exceptions that offer no real relief

Exemptions are available only for “compelling security concern or extraordinary circumstances,” limited to one aircraft on one specific date, with tight geographic and time restrictions, and require a formal application to MnDOT (in consultation with Public Safety). Routine operations, mechanical issues, or legitimate non-equipped flights get no workable carve-out.

Immediate effective date with no phase-in

The bill takes effect the day after enactment. Pilots and owners have no time to comply, creating instant violations and chaos for thousands of aircraft based in or flying over Minnesota.

HF 3916 is a solution in search of a problem — and it fails even on its own stated goal of visibility. Recommend voting NO and letting federal FAA rules govern aircraft equipment.

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