



Saint Louis County

100 North 5th Ave. West, Room 202 • Duluth, MN 55802-1287 (218) 726-2450

October 20, 2026

The Honorable Troy E. Meink
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1670

Delivered via email: Kristen.lauge.mil@army.mil

RE: Support For 148th Fighter Wing in Consideration of F-35 Lightning II Mission

Dear Secretary Meink:

As St. Louis County Commissioners, we are writing to express our strongest support for the selection of the 148th Fighter Wing of the Minnesota Air National Guard to move forward in your consideration process for receiving the F-35 Lightning II mission.

Located in St. Louis County, Minnesota – the largest county east of the Mississippi River – the 148th Fighter Wing serves as the southeast cornerstone to our region. As one of the premier fighter wings in the nation, its mission and members here have benefited from a vast airspace adjacent to a vibrant city center, the largest freshwater lake by surface area in the world, top-tier higher educational institutions, and a diverse makeup of corporate, industrial, manufacturing and family friendly employment opportunities.

The Fighter Wing in return, provides profound social and civic benefits to our region. The citizen-airmen of the 148th bring invaluable technical skills, discipline, and civic-minded leadership into our businesses, schools, and communities. The presence of a highly trained, rapid-response force provides our county with an irreplaceable layer of safety. Further, the Fighter Wing actively fosters a culture of service and innovation while inspiring the next generation of local and statewide leaders.

St. Louis County is fully committed to supporting the airmen, their families and the mission of the 148th. We understand that operational readiness begins at home, and we take pride in ensuring our military families thrive. The county continuously invests in high-quality transportation and other public infrastructure, economic growth, accessible healthcare, and robust community-based human service programming. We work closely with local veterans' organizations and family support groups to ensure that when airmen deploy, their families have a strong, reliable network of care and support systems right here at home.

The 148th Fighter Wing has a proven track record, an ideal airspace, and an unshakeable bond with the St. Louis County community. Basing F-35 Lightning II here ensures that this exceptional unit will continue to defend our nation while anchoring this community for decades to come.

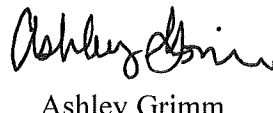
We, the undersigned St. Louis County Commissioners, thank you for your leadership and your time, and urge your strong consideration of the 148th Fighter Wing to move forward in this critical mission assignment.

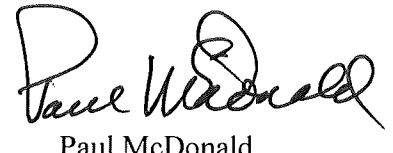
If you have any questions or would like to discuss this communication, please feel free to coordinate that outreach through Jim Gottschald, Deputy County Administrator at (218) 725-5066.

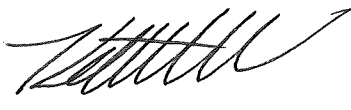
Sincerely,


Annie Harala
1st District


Patrick Boyle
2nd District


Ashley Grimm
3rd District


Paul McDonald
4th District


Keith Musolf
5th District


Keith Nelson
6th District


Michael Jugovich, Chair
7th District