



Saint Louis County

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Nadine Wells
Director/County Veterans Service Officer

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

Delivered via email: Kristen.l.auge.mil@army.mil

Dear Secretary Meink:

As the St. Louis County Veterans Service Officer, I strongly support selecting the Minnesota National Guard's Duluth-based 148th Fighter Wing to receive the F-35 Lightning II mission.

My office serves veterans, service members, dependents, and military families throughout St. Louis County, as well as individuals from neighboring counties who work or recreate here. We connect them with federal, state, county, and community benefits and resources earned through their service. Through this work, we see firsthand the strength of the military community in northeastern Minnesota and the importance of maintaining a strong, enduring military presence in our region.

The 148th Fighter Wing is an important part of that community. Its Airmen and their families are not only members of the military—they are our neighbors, relatives, coworkers, volunteers, business owners, community leaders, and fellow citizens. Maintaining and strengthening the Wing's mission in Duluth helps preserve these connections and ensures that future generations of service members and their families can continue to call this region home.

From a veteran, service member, and military-family perspective, northeastern Minnesota offers many of the supports needed to sustain a strong Guard mission. Our region has a well-established network of organizations and agencies serving veterans and service members, accessible health care, affordable housing, employment opportunities, community resources, outdoor recreation, and a strong culture of supporting those who serve. The County Veterans Service Office works closely with veterans, service members, and military-connected families to help them navigate benefits and connect with available resources.

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Ely, MN 55731
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The value of the 148th extends beyond its primary mission. Through my work with veterans from across military branches, I recognize the importance of strong relationships and cooperation among the various military organizations serving our region. Veterans who have served in other branches, including the U.S. Coast Guard, have expressed appreciation for the close relationship with the 148th and the value of its support in strengthening regional military readiness. With Duluth situated on Lake Superior and home to an internationally significant port, maintaining strong military capabilities and partnerships in our region contributes to the broader network of defense, security, and emergency preparedness that serves Minnesota and our nation.

The continued presence and modernization of the 148th also strengthens the broader military community surrounding the Wing. Its Airmen and families are part of a regional network that includes veterans of every generation, current service members, military families, veteran service organizations, local governments, businesses, health care providers, and community organizations. These connections reflect a community that understands military service does not exist in isolation. The needs of service members and their families, the contributions of veterans, and the strength of our local military partnerships are all interconnected.

The 148th's highly trained personnel, specialized expertise, and readiness to support state and national missions demonstrate that it is much more than an economic asset to our community. It is an important national defense resource whose continued presence strengthens our region's military partnerships and preparedness.

The County's commitment to the 148th is reflected in the network of services and partnerships available to support its Airmen and families. As the County Veterans Service Office, we are proud to be part of that network and remain committed to ensuring that those who serve—and those who have served—have access to the benefits, resources, and community support they have earned.

We strongly urge the Air Force to select the Duluth-based 148th Fighter Wing for the F-35 mission. The Wing brings exceptional personnel, unique capabilities, strong infrastructure, and an established military community to this mission. Just as important, it has a community behind it that understands the value of military service and is committed to supporting its Airmen and their families for generations to come.

Together, we can ensure that the 148th's proud tradition of service continues while strengthening our nation's defense and the community that stands behind those who serve.

Sincerely,



Nadine Wells
Director/County Veterans Service Officer