



MEMORANDUM

Costin Group, Inc.
600 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
T +1 218 590 5970

To Dan Stifter, Superintendent
Aitkin Public Schools, ISD#1

FROM Jeff Anderson & Gary Cerkvenik, **TELEPHONE** 218.590.5970 (Jeff) &
Costin Group, Inc. 218.749.0520 (Gary)

DATE September 11, 2024

SENT VIA E-MAIL

SUBJECT Lobbying Proposal – Letter of Interest

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a proposal for lobbying services for Aitkin Public Schools, ISD#1. We believe that our experience in helping public schools secure capital project funding, breaking through bureaucratic logjams, and establishing new revenue streams for our school clients brings the creativity and spark that could assist Aitkin Public Schools to successfully complete your facility plans and advance their importance for your voters.

Proposal

The Costin Group will work under the direction of the Superintendent and School Board of the Aitkin Public Schools to secure funding for its developing plan for new school facilities. We will help develop the tactics and strategies for successfully receiving outside funding for the project and advise on working with the city and school to present a compelling plan to public policy makers.

The Costin Group has, over the years, established a proud record of serving public education through advocacy for our clients. We were the key drafters of the new Iron Range Cooperative Funding program several years ago. We shepherded this plan through the Legislature and established millions of dollars for schools in the region. Our clients included the Virginia, Eveleth-Gilbert, and Mt. Iron Buhl schools. In addition, we successfully advocated for millions of new funding for the Chisholm and Hibbing public schools and created a \$35 million funding stream for the Duluth public schools. In Ely, over several years, our team delivered over \$12 million for new facilities and recently secured \$5.25 million for new athletic facilities for students in Ely. The Northland Learning Center has been our client and we are proud to have delivered nearly \$13

million in state assistance for its new school to be built in 2025. And we have had small successes, too, finding over \$ 1 million for new sanitary sewer systems for the St. Louis County schools as well as state funding for new lunchroom facilities in two of their member schools. On the higher education front, our team brought the first four year degree programs to the Arrowhead region through its community college systems and is currently engaged to find funding to build a new home for the University of Minnesota's Duluth Medical School.

Of course we are proud of our work, but the real applause goes to our area legislators who actually sponsored these bills and advocated for their passage. We have good relations with many legislators on both sides of the aisle who make our work possible. We are only successful with good projects, strong clients, and engaged legislators. This combination makes our work as coordinators and advocates fun, interesting, and rewarding.

The Costin Group provides clients with a partnership unique among Minnesota advocacy/lobbying firms because we execute a multifaceted approach to representing and advancing our clients' objectives. Our team of seasoned professionals help clients develop their strategy, communicate their message, engage stakeholders and achieve their public sector goals.

Our team will research, draft, and prepare proposed legislation, and recommend authors in both bodies, and will see to proper bill introductions. We work closely with our bill authors to obtain hearings, contact committee members, and prepare bill authors for hearings and floor presentations. As part of our legislative work, will also contact key members in the House and Senate for support and passage of legislation, assist with the preparation of handouts, contact all conference committee members, interact with agency staff and the Governor's office as needed if influencing the Executive Branch is warranted. We also monitor bill introductions, committee and floor agendas and committee reports.

Together, our Costin Group teams has a combined 50+ years of lobbying, elective, and staff service in government. We would like to put this extensive experience to work for Aitkin Public Schools.

Our Team, The Costin Group, Inc.

Jeff Anderson is a successful political operative, former elected official, leader in a Congressional office, and business owner. Jeff is a seasoned professional, success focused, and an aggressive advocate for his clients' objectives. Under his leadership, The Costin Group's clients are afforded crucial insights to the legislative process and offered insightful recommendations on moving the legislature and bureaucracy to achieve their goals. Jeff worked in executive leadership positions in private sector business before

servicing in government and learned the importance of focused and effective communications.

Jeff has served as the President of the Duluth City Council and District Director and Deputy Chief of Staff for Congressman Rick Nolan. A native of Ely, Minnesota, Jeff served in the Minnesota Army National Guard for 6-years and is also the co-owner of three northern Minnesota restaurants and a group travel company. He has worked with and for numerous elected officials in Minnesota and Washington, DC, including former Minnesota Attorney Generals Lori Swanson and Mike Hatch, and former Congressman Rick Nolan.

The Costin Group's client work has included achieving \$194 million dollars in funding for the Northern Lights Express inter-city passenger rail project; a \$100 million incentive package to jump start the Vision Northland Essentia Health \$900 million new hospital complex in Duluth; funding over \$25 million for the creation of the Mesabi Trail running from the Mississippi to the Boundary Waters; funding the Duluth School District's \$32 million 2022 facilities project; and securing \$30 million in funding for the Voyageurs National Park Clean Water Project among many other legislative projects. Notably, in recent years, The Costin Group has worked on numerous ATV trail funding projects and has helped achieve millions of dollars in funding for many ATV clubs in Northeastern Minnesota. Our Group has also successfully lobbied for snowmobile trails as well.

Gary Cerkvenik is a hands-on organizer who brings creativity and passion to issues. A strong communicator and consensus builder with broad experience in the private and public sectors.

Gary has been a consultant in politics, economic development, and federal/state lobbying.

In politics, he was elected the youngest Chair of the St. Louis County Board and played a lead role in the Dukakis for President campaign. He has worked for Congressman Jim Oberstar, Governor Rudy Perpich, U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone, U.S. Senator John Kerry, the Carter-Mondale campaign, and was the first Executive Director of the Minnesota DFL Party. He has been a key advisor on many state, local, and national political campaigns, and has written campaign plans for several state general elections.

From organizing the largest event in the history of New England—Earth Day 1990 in Boston under Earth Day Founder Denis Hayes to managing the first two stages of the Nature Valley Grand Prix professional bike races, Gary has had a wide and varied career. He taught government and philosophy at the local college, holds a Master of Arts degree in World War II Studies, and was a co-founder/patent holder at Spring Creek Outfitters. He holds the distinction of winning the Minnesota Border to Border Triathlon and has been a track and cross-country coach and a track and soccer official with the MSHSL.

Client References

John Klarich, former Superintendent and former Mayor (218-969-0176) – We have worked with Mr. Klarich on several school expansion projects, and municipal bonding projects in the City of Buhl.

Andrew Askew, Essentia Health (701-351-2326) – We have worked to secure a \$100 million incentive package used in the construction of the new St. Mary's Essentia Hospital in Duluth. We have also worked successfully to stop several policy provisions that concerned health care providers.

Cathy Erickson, Two Harbors City Council and former Duluth Schools CFO (218-830-0831) – We have worked with Ms. Erickson in several roles, most recently in her role as CFO with the Duluth Public Schools, where our team worked to change legislation to allow for DPS to use \$32 million in LTFM funding to build a new administrative building and transportation center.

Noel Schmidt, Superintendent of the Rock Ridge Public Schools (218-742-3901). Our work included several funding streams for the new Rock Ridge school system.

Compensation

We try to make it simple. No expenses. No unnecessary charges. No surprises.

\$3,500.00 per month. 12-month contract. 60-day cancellation clause if we aren't doing the job to your satisfaction.

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