



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND

October 6, 2022

Mr. Michael C. Westfall
Office of the State Inspector General
P.O. Box 1151
Richmond, VA 23218

Re: Request for Investigation of Virginia Tourism
Authority's Promotional Ad Campaign Featuring
Governor Youngkin

Dear Mr. Westfall:

We are writing to ask you to investigate the award of \$268,000 of taxpayer dollars to Governor Youngkin's political advertising firm pursuant to alleged "Request for Proposal" process ("The Alleged RFP Process") pursuant to the Virginia Tourism Authority's ("VTA") procurement exemption to procure a promotional ad featuring the Governor ("The Governor's Ad") pursuant to your authority under § 2.2-309 of the Code of Virginia to investigate waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayers dollars.

The company chosen to produce the ad, Poolhouse, has direct ties to Governor Youngkin. Poolhouse was paid over \$1.5 million for political advertisements during the 2021 Gubernatorial election cycle by Governor Youngkin's Campaign Committee. In a recent media interview, VTA's Executive Director acknowledged that the VTA was aware of the company's "familiarity" with Governor Youngkin and found that to be "attractive" in awarding the bid.

The chosen vendor has no history of working with the state or the VTA. The Authority has never featured a Governor in advertising of this type in prior campaigns. It is well-known that the Governor is conducting a preliminary campaign for the Republican Nomination for President and has opened two federal campaign accounts - "Spirit of Virginia" and "America's Spirit" - to support his activities and federal candidates in anticipation of his Presidential run and such an ad would confer taxpayer benefits on him while he builds his name identification and familiarity with persons outside of Virginia in anticipation of his run. See Laura Vozzella, *Youngkin Eyeing National Politics, While Va. Business Remains Delayed*, Washington Post (Apr. 21, 2022).

This situation presents serious questions regarding the use of taxpayer dollars for political purposes, and abuse of and/or the continued existence of the VTA's procurement exemption set forth in § 38.2-2325 of the Code of Virginia. We believe you need to investigate in order to provide clarity to taxpayers that no laws were violated and that The Alleged RFP Process was conducted consistent with state standard. Please answer the following questions:

- Where did the idea for the promotional ad featuring Governor Youngkin originate?
- When did this idea originate?
- Were there any pre-meetings with Poolhouse regarding The Alleged RFP prior to The Alleged RFP being published?

- What internal VTA policies, processes, and standards are in place regarding the use of such “Request for Proposal” processes to ensure that spending decisions are made consistent in a non-partisan, objective and cost-effective fashion consistent with taxpayer expectations for the use of taxpayer dollars?
- Where dollars used from the Cooperative Marketing Fund set up pursuant to § 38.2-2319 of the Code of Virginia or the VTA’s general appropriations and what internal VTA policies, processes, and standards are in place regarding the use of dollars from the Cooperative Marketing Fund to ensure that such dollars are not used for a Governor’s personal political objectives?
- Has the VTA ever conducted a Request for Proposal process similar to The Alleged RFP Process for a prior spending decision or decision involving this amount or greater of tax dollars? If so, please detail whether a similar process, deadlines, and decision-making process was used.
- Were any alternative processes considered to obtain proposals in lieu of The Alleged RFP Process?
- Were all existing internal VTA policies, processes, and standards followed for The Alleged RFP Process?
- What state employees and non-state employees, including consultants or members of the Governor’s political team, were involved in the development of The Alleged RFP Process?
- Please investigate how Poolhouse was able to respond to The Alleged RFP on the day it was published?
- Did Poolhouse propose or enter into any agreements, including any non-compete agreements, with VTC prior to award of the contract under The Alleged RFP process and has the VTC ever engaged in similar practices in the past?
- How was a budget determined for The Alleged RFP Process?
- Is \$268,000 to produce a single short television video a typical price for such services?
- How did Poolhouse develop its proposal including its proposed price for the ad?
- How were potential bidders identified and what vendors were consulted before the Alleged RFP Process was published?
- How was The Alleged RFP Process disseminated or published to maximize bidding, minimize taxpayer expenses and provide the best value to taxpayers?
- Why was The Alleged RFP Process set using deadlines that allowed only one bidder - the Governor’s political ad firm - were capable to meet?
- Why did the VTA not conduct a new process after only one bid was received?
- Why was there any urgency at all regarding a campaign to welcome tourists to Virginia that drove deadlines favorable to only one bidder?
- What individuals were involved in setting The Alleged RFP Process deadlines and has the authority ever used similar deadlines in prior requests for proposals?
- What advice and comment of the Board of Directors of the VTA was sought or received in this change in state policy pursuant to § 38.2-2316 of the Code of Virginia including any involvement in the decision to use The Alleged RFP Process to secure a vendor?
- What individuals are involved in the decisions regarding placement of The Governor’s Ad?
- Does the VTA have any intentions to feature the ad beyond Virginia’s borders and what systems are in place to ensure that such decisions are not being made to maximize the Governor’s political objectives in his attempts to see the Republican nomination for President as opposed to Virginia tourism potential?

The actions by Governor Youngkin and the VTC are deeply concerning and raise serious questions about the use of state tax dollars for campaign purposes and potential waste,

fraud or abuse of taxpayer dollars. For all these reasons we are calling on the Office of the Inspector General to immediately investigate this matter in order to answer these and any other questions.


We further ask you to report the findings to the Majority and Minority Leaders of both parties and the Chairmen of the House and Senate General Laws Committees who are the committees with jurisdiction over procurement matters as you did with your findings from your investigation of the Virginia Parole Board. We further ask that you use the full extent of your subpoena authority under § 2.2-312 to see documents and testimony from third parties in this matter.

Finally, we would ask that you report to us if any state employee or third party is not cooperative with your investigation or if any member of the Governor's Office attempts to exert undue influence on your investigation pursuant to § 2.2-310.1 which became effective on July 1, 2022.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Saslaw".

Senator Richard L. Saslaw
Majority Leader, 35th Senate District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Don Scott".

Delegate Don Scott
Minority Leader, 80th House District