

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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## Venango Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association Crawford County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022

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January 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. John Smith, President  
Venango Volunteer Fire Department  
Relief Association  
Crawford County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Venango Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022. The audit was conducted pursuant to authority derived from Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, 72 P.S. § 403; and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act ("VFRA Act"), see 35 Pa.C.S. § 7418.

The objective of the audit was to determine if the relief association complied with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures as they relate to the receipt of state aid and the expenditure of relief association funds. Our audit was limited to the areas related to the objective identified above and was not, nor was it required to be, conducted in accordance with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief association funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures, including the safeguarding of assets. Relief association officers are responsible for complying with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures. It is our responsibility to perform procedures to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to the extent necessary to satisfy the audit objective. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions.

We were not able to obtain copies of canceled or imaged checks from the relief association. While the relief association provided bank statements, the relief association failed to provide copies of canceled or imaged checks. Without copies of canceled or imaged checks, we were not able to determine whether two relief association officers authorized and signed the checks as required by the VFRA Act.

Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, except for the effects, if any, of the matter described in the preceding paragraph, for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022, the relief association, in all significant respects, complied with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures as they relate to the receipt of state aid and the expenditure of relief association funds, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding – Failure To Maintain Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the relief association and, where appropriate, their response has been included in the report. We would like to thank the relief association officials for the cooperation extended to us during the conduct of the audit.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Timothy L. DeFoor  
Auditor General  
January 9, 2024

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## BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code<sup>1</sup>, and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act<sup>2</sup> ("VFRA Act"), the Department of the Auditor General's duty is to audit the accounts and records of every volunteer firefighters' relief association to determine that funds received under the Foreign Fire Insurance Tax Distribution Law<sup>3</sup> (commonly referred to as Act 205) are properly expended.

The relief association is a charitable organization that was formed primarily to afford financial protection to volunteer firefighters and to encourage individuals to participate in volunteer fire service.

The VFRA Act governs the overall operation of volunteer firefighters' relief associations. Relief association bylaws define the specific operational procedures by which relief associations conduct business. To fulfill its primary purpose, the VFRA Act authorizes specific types of expenditures and prescribes appropriate volunteer firefighters' relief association investment options. Within the parameters established by the VFRA Act, it is the responsibility of relief associations to choose investments in a proper and prudent manner.

Volunteer firefighters' relief associations receive public tax monies, and the relief association officers therefore have a responsibility to the public to conduct the relief association's financial affairs in a businesslike manner and to maintain sufficient financial records to support the propriety of all relief association transactions. Volunteer firefighters' relief association officers are also responsible for ensuring that the relief association operates in accordance with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures.

Act 205 sets forth the computation of the Foreign Fire Insurance Tax Distribution paid to each applicable municipality throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The amount of the distribution is based upon the population of each municipality and the market value of real estate within the municipality. Upon receipt of this distribution, the municipality must allocate the funds to the volunteer firefighters' relief association of the fire service organization or fire service organizations that is or are recognized as providing the service to the municipality.

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<sup>1</sup> 72 P.S. § 403 (as last amended by Act 44 of 2017).

<sup>2</sup> 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.* See specifically, 35 Pa.C.S. § 7418 (amended by Act 91 of 2020).

<sup>3</sup> 53 P.S. § 895.701 *et seq.* (Act 205 of 1984, as amended by Act 119 of 1990).

**BACKGROUND – (Continued)**

The relief association was allocated state aid from the following municipalities:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Cambridge Township	Crawford	\$1,657	\$ 1,918
Cussewago Township	Crawford	\$1,196	\$ 1,394
Hayfield Township	Crawford	\$ 632	\$ 745
Venango Borough	Crawford	\$ 812	\$ 902
Venango Township	Crawford	\$2,240	\$ 2,661*
Woodcock Borough	Crawford	\$ 311	\$ 354
Woodcock Township	Crawford	\$ 834	\$ 997

\* The relief association did not deposit the 2022 state aid allocation it received from Venango Township, in the amount of \$2,661, until November 20, 2023. The foreign fire insurance tax allocation was distributed to the municipal treasurer on September 21, 2022, who forwarded this state aid to the affiliated fire company instead of the relief association on November 3, 2022, which is within 60 days of receipt, as required by Section 706 (b)(2) of the Act of December 18, 1984, (P.L. 1005, No. 205); however, the state aid allocation should be sent directly to the relief association. Since the state aid allocation was sent to the affiliated fire company, instead of the relief association, the state aid allocation was erroneously deposited by the affiliated fire company. As a result of our audit, the error was discovered, and the affiliated fire company reimbursed the relief association on November 17, 2023, and the relief association deposited the funds on November 20, 2023, into a relief association account.

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2022, was \$11,945, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 11,945
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## BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022, were \$19,598, as noted below. The accuracy of these expenditures was evaluated as part of the Department’s audit to conclude on the relief association’s compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures as they relate to the receipt of state aid and the expenditure of relief association funds.<sup>4</sup> **The scope of the Department’s audit does not include the issuance of an opinion on the accuracy of these amounts.**

### Expenditures:

#### Benefit Services:

Insurance premiums	<u>\$ 11,710</u>
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#### Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 4,223
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Equipment maintenance	171
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Training expenses	<u>3,394</u>
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Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 7,788</u>
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#### Administrative Services:

Bond premiums	<u>\$ 100</u>
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Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 19,598</u></u>
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The volunteer firefighters’ relief association and the affiliated fire service organization are separate, legal entities. The relief association is affiliated with the following fire service organization:

Venango Volunteer Fire Department

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<sup>4</sup> Accuracy was evaluated for a selection of transactions based on dollar amount, category, and/or random selection.

VENANGO VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

**Finding – Failure To Maintain Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage**

**Condition:** The relief association failed to maintain Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on its authorized disbursing officer, as required by the VFRA Act. Subsequent to the period under review, the relief association’s Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage expired on July 13, 2023. As of December 31, 2022, the relief association’s cash assets totaled \$11,945.

**Criteria:** Section 7415(c)(4) of the VFRA Act states, in part, that:

. . . the disbursing officer, whether designated treasurer, comptroller, financial secretary or otherwise, shall be bonded by corporate surety for faithful performance of duty. The amount of the bond shall be at least as great as the maximum cash balance in current funds of the association at any time during the fiscal year, and the premium on the bond shall be a proper charge against the funds of the association.

**Cause:** Relief association officials indicated their policy was canceled; however, they did not receive a cancellation notice.

**Effect:** As a result of the authorized disbursing officer of the relief association not being bonded, the relief association’s cash assets were not adequately safeguarded.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the relief association officials obtain Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on the relief association’s authorized disbursing officer in an amount greater than the relief association’s maximum cash balance, as required by the VFRA Act. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General’s publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS’ RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

**Management’s Response:** Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and, as a result of our audit, the relief association purchased bond coverage in an amount greater than the relief association’s maximum cash balance on November 22, 2023.

**Auditor’s Conclusion:** We reviewed documentation verifying that bond coverage was obtained on November 22, 2023. Compliance for maintaining bond coverage during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.



VENANGO VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

**The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro**  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Venango Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association Governing Body:

**Mr. John Smith**  
President

**Mr. Robert Proper**  
Vice President

**Ms. Jean Acker**  
Secretary

**Mr. Ronald J. Riley**  
Treasurer

VENANGO VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

The following municipalities allocated foreign fire insurance tax monies to this relief association and received a copy of this report:

**Ms. Debra E. Merritt**  
Secretary  
Cambridge Township

**Ms. Deborah Acker**  
Secretary  
Cussewago Township

**Ms. Jennifer McClymonds**  
Secretary  
Hayfield Township

**Ms. Tiffany McCray**  
Secretary  
Venango Borough

**Ms. Elizabeth Waterhouse**  
Secretary  
Venango Township

**Ms. Sharron E. Diley**  
Secretary  
Woodcock Borough

**Ms. Renee D. Hayes**  
Secretary  
Woodcock Township

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://www.PaAuditor.gov). Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 229 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: [news@PaAuditor.gov](mailto:news@PaAuditor.gov).