



Pennsylvania Department of the

AUDITOR GENERAL

Facebook: Pennsylvania Auditor General

Twitter: @PaAuditorGen

News for Immediate Release

Sept. 5, 2019

Auditor General DePasquale Says Changes Needed to Help More Volunteer Firefighters Protect Communities They Serve

Law severely restricts how funding is used; leaving millions in bank accounts while firefighters struggle

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today called for changes to state law to give volunteer firefighters more flexibility to use the state aid they receive to help protect their communities.

“When we have an emergency, we count on firefighters to come to our aid,” DePasquale said. “But the way fire companies operate is changing and the brave men and women willing to risk their lives to protect us need our help.”

Current state law tightly restricts how volunteer firefighters’ relief associations (VFRA) may spend the state aid they receive.

“Some relief associations have met their operational funding needs and have accumulated significant reserves that they may be unable to spend because of the restrictions contained in state law,” DePasquale said. “At the same time, relief associations statewide are having difficulty recruiting new volunteers and struggling to provide support to their affiliated fire departments.”

DePasquale said the situation is even more complicated where fire departments rely on a combined staff of paid and volunteer firefighters. Relief associations are legally separate from the fire departments they support and state aid provided under Act 118 of 2010 is intended to solely benefit volunteer firefighters.

“Because of the way the current law is written, relief associations lack the flexibility to fully use their allotment of state funding to help other volunteer firefighters protect our communities,” he said.

The recent audit of the York Volunteer Firemen’s Relief Association, which has more than \$4 million in cash and investments, highlights the need for changes in the law.

“In fact, there are nearly 60 volunteer relief associations sitting on a reserve balance above \$1 million because current law severely restricts how they can use the money. I want to make sure that state funding intended to help volunteer firefighters is doing exactly that.

“I’ll bet if you ask any one of these associations how they could use this money to help recruit, equip and protect volunteer firefighters, they’d give you a list a mile long. But, then they would tell you they are not allowed because the law is so narrow that it’s hurting firefighters. Clearly, the law must change.”

DePasquale was joined by Harrisburg Fire Chief Brian Enterline in calling on the General Assembly to fix the law so that state funding can be used in a way that better meets local needs.

Act 118 of 2010 governs the overall operation of volunteer firefighter relief associations and restricts how state funding may be spent. The list of eligible expenses is found online [here](#).

VFRAs receive state aid from a 2 percent state tax on fire insurance premiums purchased by Pennsylvania residents from out-of-state casualty insurance companies. In 2018, 2,518 municipalities received \$55.1 million for distribution to VFRAs to provide training, purchase equipment and insurance,

and pay for death benefits for volunteer firefighters. The Department of the Auditor General distributes the state aid following a formula set in Act 205 of 1984.

“The formula that directs where state funding goes has not been updated since 1984,” DePasquale noted. “The way communities provide fire protection services has changed a lot in the past 35 years, and the General Assembly needs to bring the law into the 21st century.”

DePasquale said regardless of whether relief associations have cash reserves, Pennsylvanians should continue to generously support local fire departments and also consider volunteering.

Review the [York Volunteer Firemen’s Relief Association of the City of York](#) audit report and learn more about the Department of the Auditor General online at www.paauditor.gov.

###

Editor’s Note: Following is a list of 59 Volunteer Firefighters’ Relief Associations with a fund balance above \$1 million since 2015 according to the most recent audits conducted by the Department of the Auditor General.

59 VFRA's have a fund balance above \$1 million because current law severely restricts how they can use the money to support firefighters							
County	VFRA	Fund Balance	As of December	County	VFRA	Fund Balance	As of December
Allegheny	Monroeville	\$2,710,835	2016	Delaware	Newtown Square	\$2,058,175	2016
Allegheny	Bethel Park	\$2,060,665	2018	Delaware	Haverford Township	\$1,747,847	2016
Allegheny	Ross Township	\$1,439,046	2015	Delaware	Glenolden	\$1,621,107	2018
Allegheny	Mt. Lebanon	\$1,168,025	2016	Delaware	Upper Providence	\$1,446,607	2017
Allegheny	Shaler Township	\$1,050,399	2015	Delaware	Sharon Hill	\$1,232,274	2016
Bedford	Bedford	\$1,553,347	2018	Elk	St. Marys	\$1,014,261	2016
Berks	Reading	\$3,437,115	2017	Franklin	Chambersburg	\$1,627,438	2018
Bucks	Yardley-Makefield	\$8,049,640	2017	Lackawanna	Dunmore	\$1,190,348	2018
Bucks	Northampton Township	\$3,601,179	2017	Lehigh	Allentown	\$1,095,341	2017
Bucks	Doylestown	\$2,325,705	2018	Luzerne	Pittston	\$10,498,556	2018
Bucks	Langhorne Borough	\$2,060,792	2017	Luzerne	Hazleton	\$2,625,709	2016
Bucks	Parkland	\$1,951,565	2017	Luzerne	Nanticoke	\$1,034,034	2018
Bucks	Penndel-Middletown	\$1,820,314	2016	Mercer	Joint Hermitage/Patagonia	\$1,953,579	2016
Bucks	Chalfont	\$1,388,618	2017	Monroe	East Stroudsburg	\$3,235,897	2019
Bucks	Pendel Fire Co. No. 1	\$1,042,970	2016	Monroe	Mt. Pocono	\$1,041,566	2017
Bucks	Eagle Fire Company	\$1,042,021	2018	Montgomery	Jenkintown	\$5,517,463	2017
Butler	Cranberry Township	\$4,868,327	2019	Montgomery	Upper Dublin Township	\$4,214,293	2017
Centre	State College	\$4,618,602	2015	Montgomery	Norristown	\$2,243,846	2016
Chester	West Chester	\$11,711,684	2017	Montgomery	Whitemarsh Township	\$1,886,120	2017
Chester	Paoli	\$4,581,796	2017	Montgomery	Upper Merion Township	\$1,770,467	2017
Chester	Coatesville	\$2,535,338	2017	Montgomery	Enterprise Fire Co. of Hatboro	\$1,715,729	2017
Clearfield	DuBois	\$1,085,696	2017	Montgomery	Centre Square (Whitpain)	\$1,649,428	2017
Columbia	Berwick	\$2,790,437	2018	Montgomery	Horsham	\$1,617,108	2017
Columbia	Bloomsburg	\$1,290,757	2017	Montgomery	Willow Grove	\$1,514,965	2017
Cumberland	Lower Allen Township	\$1,224,688	2018	Montgomery	Jefferson (West Norriton)	\$1,488,216	2018
Dauphin	City of Harrisburg	\$16,292,364	2016	Montgomery	Souderton	\$1,096,630	2018
Dauphin	Susquehanna Township	\$1,011,623	2017	Westmoreland	Greensburg	\$3,653,500	2017
Delaware	Radnor	\$8,030,209	2017	Westmoreland	Latrobe	\$1,312,875	2016
Delaware	Upper Darby Township	\$4,116,433	2016	York	York	\$4,281,405	2017
Delaware	Broomall	\$3,260,956	2017				