



Pennsylvania Department of the

# AUDITOR GENERAL

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## News for Immediate Release

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### Auditor General DePasquale Launches Review of Funding for Volunteer Firefighters

*Creating reliable funding, expanding how money is used could boost volunteer recruitment statewide*

**MECHANICSBURG, Cumberland County** – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today announced he will conduct a review to make sure volunteer firefighters are receiving the maximum amount of state aid funding and urge legislators to expand how the money can be used.

“Volunteer firefighters work hard training and responding to emergencies,” DePasquale said during a visit to Mechanicsburg’s Washington fire station. “When state funding changes from year to year it creates yet another financial headache for men and women who sign up to protect their communities.

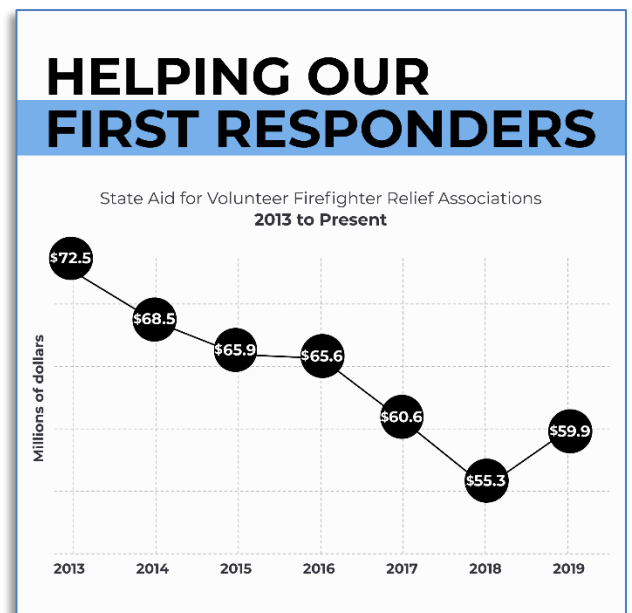
“I am working with the Department of Revenue to review how the funding is collected and allocated to determine if it can be stabilized so firefighters know how much they can count on from the state each year.”

State aid to volunteer firefighters’ relief associations (VFRAs) comes from a 2 percent state tax on fire insurance premiums purchased by Pennsylvania residents from out-of-state insurance companies. Last year DePasquale’s office distributed \$59.99 million to VFRAs through 2,518 municipalities.

“That was the first time since I took office that VFRA funding had increased over the previous year,” DePasquale said. “That’s good news, but no one can predict how much money will be available next year and that makes it difficult for fire companies already struggling with dwindling volunteers and increasing demands for fundraising.”

DePasquale repeated his call for the General Assembly to give VFRAs greater flexibility to use the state aid they receive in ways that meet specific local needs, such as for specialized equipment or volunteer recruitment efforts. Current state law tightly restricts how the money may be spent.

“I want to make sure that the law governing the use of state aid is keeping up with changes in how fire services are provided and can be used to help recruit more volunteers,” he said, noting that two volunteer fire companies serving Mechanicsburg recently consolidated into a single organization to reduce costs and improve efficiency.



Mechanicsburg is the latest example of a growing trend for volunteer fire departments struggling to meet emergency demands with a dwindling number of volunteers, many of whom spend more time raising funds than fighting fires.

Between 2015 and 2018, the Mechanicsburg VFRA which supports the volunteer fire department, experienced a \$10,000 drop in funding from the state with no explanation.

Act 118 of 2010 governs the overall operation of volunteer firefighter relief associations, which are legally separate from the fire departments they support. State aid provided under the law is intended to solely benefit volunteer firefighters. The list of eligible expenses is found [online here](#).

In addition to distributing the funding to VFRA's, the Department of the Auditor General also audits those organizations to ensure state aid is spent appropriately.

The state's Center for Local Government Services can provide assistance to struggling fire companies interested in regionalizing services: [www.dced.pa.gov/fire](http://www.dced.pa.gov/fire).

Learn more about VFRA funding and the Department of the Auditor General online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://www.PaAuditor.gov).

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**UPDATED EDITOR'S NOTE:** Following is the total **allocated** annual VFRA state aid for 2013 through 2019:

2013: \$72,540,483

2014: \$68,568,188

2015: \$65,937,256

2016: \$65,669,119

2017: \$60,667,201

2018: **\$55,320,399**

2019: **\$60,125,652**