

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Beech Creek - Blanchard Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association Clinton County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020

March 2021



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0018
Facebook: Pennsylvania Auditor General
Twitter: @PAAuditorGen
www.PaAuditor.gov

TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Keith Bittner, President
Beech Creek - Blanchard Volunteer
Fireman's Relief Association
Clinton County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Beech Creek - Blanchard Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association (relief association) pursuant to authority derived from Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, Act of April 9, 1929, (P.L. 343, No. 176), and mandated by the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act, as consolidated by the Act of November 23, 2010 (P.L. 1181, No. 118), at 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.*, for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020.

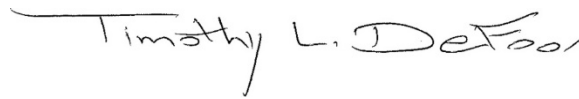
The objective of the audit was to determine if the relief association complied with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures as they relate to the receipt of state aid and the expenditure of relief association funds. Our audit was limited to the areas related to the objective 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 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.

Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020, 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 – Unauthorized Expenditure

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

March 17, 2021

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Background	1
Finding and Recommendation:	
Finding – Unauthorized Expenditure	4
Report Distribution List	5

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, Act of April 9, 1929, (P.L. 343, No. 176), and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act, as consolidated by the Act of November 23, 2010, (P.L. 1181, No. 118), at 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.*, 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, Act of December 18, 1984, (P.L. 1005, No. 205), as amended, 53 P.S. § 895.701 *et seq.* (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.

Act 118 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, Act 118 authorizes specific types of expenditures and prescribes appropriate volunteer firefighters' relief association investment options. Within the parameters established by Act 118, 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 association officers therefore have a responsibility to the public to conduct the association's financial affairs in a businesslike manner and to maintain sufficient financial records to support the propriety of all association transactions. Volunteer firefighters' relief association officers are also responsible for ensuring that the 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.

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

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

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Curtin Township	Centre	\$ 602	\$ 642	\$ 648
Liberty Township	Centre	\$9,261	\$9,923	\$10,069
Beech Creek Borough	Clinton	\$2,934	\$3,226	\$ 3,260
Beech Creek Township	Clinton	\$6,656	\$7,301	\$ 7,378

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2020 were \$142,749, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 120,650
Book Value of Other Investments	<u>22,099</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u><u>\$ 142,749</u></u>

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020 were \$81,775, 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.¹ **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	\$ 21,880
Death benefits	300
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 22,180</u>

Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 53,159
Equipment maintenance	2,536
Training expenses	755
Fire prevention materials	1,200
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 57,650</u>

Administrative Services:

Other administrative expenses	\$ 69
Bond premiums	400
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 469</u>

Other Expenditures:

Unauthorized expenditure	<u>\$ 1,476</u>
--------------------------	-----------------

Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 81,775</u></u>
--------------------	-------------------------

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:

Beech Creek – Blanchard Volunteer Fire Company

¹ Accuracy was evaluated for a selection of transactions based on dollar amount, category, and/or random selection.

BEECH CREEK - BLANCHARD VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Unauthorized Expenditure

Condition: The relief association expended \$1,476 for maintenance on a fire company owned vehicle during the current audit period that is not authorized by Act 118.

Criteria: Section 7416(f) of Act 118 states:

The funds of any volunteer firefighters' relief association may be spent:

- (1) To pay for such normal and reasonable running expenses as may be appropriate to the businesslike conduct of the affairs of the association, including legal fees, rental or purchase of offices, payment of reasonable compensation of employees and purchase of office equipment and supplies.

- (11) To purchase safeguards for preserving life, health and safety of volunteer firefighters to ensure their availability to participate in the volunteer fire service.

Costs associated with maintenance on a fire company owned vehicle do not qualify as an authorized volunteer firefighters' relief association expenditure; consequently, this disbursement is not authorized under Act 118.

Cause: Relief association officials did not realize that this would be considered unauthorized as they looked at the vehicle as safety equipment and not maintenance.

Effect: As a result of this improper expenditure, relief association funds were not available for investment purposes or to pay for expenditures authorized by Act 118.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$1,476 for the unauthorized expenditure and that relief association officials become familiar with Section 7416(f) of Act 118 to aid them in determining the propriety of future expenditures. 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 affiliated fire company reimbursed the relief association \$1,476 for the unauthorized expenditure on March 5, 2021.

Auditor's Conclusion: We reviewed documentation verifying that the reimbursement of \$1,476 was received. Compliance for expenditures made during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.

BEECH CREEK - BLANCHARD VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Beech Creek - Blanchard Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Keith Bittner
President

Mr. James Watson
Secretary

Mr. Nathan Shadle
Treasurer

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

Ms. Lynnette Harter
Secretary
Curtin Township

Ms. Michelle Wetzel
Secretary
Liberty Township

Ms. Veronica Roan
Secretary
Beech Creek Borough

Ms. Denise A. Bittner
Secretary
Beech Creek Township

BEECH CREEK - BLANCHARD VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at 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.