

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Belleville Fire Co #1 Relief Association

Mifflin County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021

August 2022



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. John Chester, President
Belleville Fire Co #1 Relief Association
Mifflin County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Belleville Fire Co #1 Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021. 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 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, 2019 to December 31, 2021, 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 – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

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
August 3, 2022

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BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code¹, and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act² ("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 Law³ (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 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.

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

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

³ 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 municipality:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
Union Township	Mifflin	\$18,760	\$19,114	\$16,926

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2021 was \$32,790, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 32,790</u>
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Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021 were \$50,282, 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.⁴ **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>\$ 12,651</u>
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Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 31,396
Equipment maintenance	3,669
Training expenses	<u>1,940</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 37,005</u>

Administrative Services:

Bond premiums	<u>\$ 626</u>
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Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 50,282</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:

Belleville Fire Company #1

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

BELLEVILLE FIRE CO #1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

Condition: During the current audit engagement, we identified 18 out of 33 current audit period expenditures and one out of ten post audit period expenditures drawn on the relief association's checking account that did not contain the proper signatory authority. All 43 checks contained the signature of the disbursing officer as required by the VFRA Act; however, 19 checks contained cosigners who were not authorized signers according to the relief association bylaws and the VFRA Act.

Criteria: Section 7415(c)(3) of the VFRA Act states, in part:

The bylaws shall require that the signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the disbursing officer, shall be required to bind the association by formal contract or to issue a negotiable instrument.

The relief association's bylaws at Article III, Section I states, in part:

The officers of the association shall consist of a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The officers shall be responsible for the management of the association's business upon direction received from the membership at association meetings.

In addition, the relief association's bylaws at Article VIII, Section I states, in part:

The signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the treasurer, shall be required for the issuance of relief association checks, withdrawal from the association savings account, the redemption of any relief association investment, or on any other negotiable instrument issued by the association.

Furthermore, prudent business practice dictates that the relief association has sufficient internal control procedures in place to ensure the signatures of at least two relief association officials are included on all negotiable instruments. Adequate internal control procedures require that checks be signed only after the propriety of the expenditure has been determined and the payee, date, and amount to be paid has been confirmed. Additionally, responsible relief association officers should compare this information with supporting documentation, such as invoices, contracts, etc., prior to approving the checks.

Cause: The relief association officials stated these errors occurred because the individuals who signed the checks were authorized signers on record with the bank. However, they agreed that the individuals were not authorized in the bylaws.

BELLEVILLE FIRE CO #1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – (Continued)

Effect: As a result of the relief association officer issuing checks with only one authorized signature, assets were placed at greater risk as expenditures were being made without an authorized second relief association officer having the opportunity to verify the propriety of the expenditures. The application of the authorized second signature, after evaluating the propriety of the expenditure, reduces the risk of misappropriation and the risk of errors occurring and going undetected.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure that the signatures of at least two authorized officers, one of whom shall be the Treasurer, are included on all relief association negotiable instruments as defined 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 indicated they will take action to comply with the recommendation.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

BELLEVILLE FIRE CO #1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Mr. Charles J. McGarvey, Sr.
State Fire Commissioner

Belleville Fire Co #1 Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. John Chester
President

Mr. Doug Pierce
Vice President

Mr. Kendrick Zook
Secretary

Mr. Jalon Zook
Treasurer

A report was also distributed to the following municipality, which allocated foreign fire insurance tax monies to this relief association:

Ms. Michelle L. Shirey
Secretary
Union Township

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.