

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Branch Township Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2021

February 2023



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Mark Oshman, President
Branch Township Volunteer
Fireman's Relief Association
Schuylkill County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Branch Township Volunteer Fireman's 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 Minutes Of Meetings

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
February 6, 2023

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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.

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>
Branch Township	Schuylkill	\$8,769	\$8,864	\$7,828

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)

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2021, were \$35,688, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 23,866
Fair Value of Investments	<u>11,822</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u>\$ 35,688</u>

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2021, were \$24,826, 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	\$ 11,961
Death benefits	<u>800</u>
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 12,761</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 5,029
Equipment maintenance	5,447
Fire prevention materials	<u>839</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 11,315</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	<u>\$ 750</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 24,826</u>

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

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

The volunteer firefighters' relief association and the affiliated fire service organizations are separate, legal entities. The relief association is affiliated with the following fire service organizations:

Good Intent Hose Company No. 1

Phoenix Park Community Fire Company

BRANCH TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings

Condition: The relief association failed to maintain detailed minutes of meetings as required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws. Specifically, the relief association's minutes did not address all of the financial-related transactions that occurred during the audit period and the minutes were not signed. In addition, the relief's bylaws require quarterly meetings; however, the relief only provided minutes for three meetings in calendar year 2020 and two meetings in calendar year 2021.

Criteria: Section 7415(a) of the VFRA Act states, in part, that the relief association:

. . . must provide for taking and preserving minutes of all meetings and maintenance of such books of account as may be necessary and appropriate to afford a permanent record of its fiscal affairs.

The relief association's bylaws at Article II, Section 1 states, in part:

Regular meetings of this association shall be held on the third Wednesday of January, April, July, and October.

In addition, the relief association's bylaws at Article III, Section 3 states, in part:

The minutes shall note authorization by the membership of all association financial transactions.

Cause: Relief association officials indicated that the secretary was in and out of the hospital during the audit period but did not identify more specifically the reasons for the deficiencies.

Effect: Without holding regular meetings and maintaining detailed minutes of meetings that are signed and documentation that quorum requirements are met, evidence that relief association business was presented before the membership for approval does not exist.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials hold regular meetings and maintain detailed minutes of meetings, evidencing the discussion and approval of all financial-related business conducted by the relief association. We also recommend that the relief association officials ensure that all meeting minutes are signed and dated by the relief association secretary and that attendance records are maintained to ensure that quorum requirements are met. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

BRANCH TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – (Continued)

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.

BRANCH TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Branch Township Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Mark Oshman
President

Mr. Robert Sinko, Jr.
Vice President

Ms. Kay Neidlinger
Secretary

Ms. Danielle Wank
Treasurer

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

Ms. Sue Ellen Holley
Secretary
Branch 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.