COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Conyngham Township Fireman's Relief Association

Columbia County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020

February 2022





Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Joseph Pavloski, President Conyngham Township Fireman's Relief Association Columbia County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Conyngham Township Fireman's Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020. 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.

We were not able to obtain copies of canceled or imaged checks from the relief association. While the relief association provided bank statements, the relief association failed to provide copies of canceled or imaged checks. Without copies of canceled or imaged checks, we were not able to determine whether two relief association officers authorized and signed the checks as required by the VFRA Act.

Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, except for the effects, if any, of the matter described in the preceding paragraph, 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 findings listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding No. 1 – Undocumented Expenditures

Finding No. 2 – Failure To Maintain Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage

Finding No. 3 – Failure To Maintain Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number

Finding No. 4 - Failure To Disclose A Related Party Transaction

Finding No. 5 - Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

Finding No. 6 – Inadequate Financial Record-Keeping System And Inadequate Internal Controls

Finding No. 7 – Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings

Finding No. 8 - Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster

We are concerned by the number of findings noted and strongly encourage timely implementation of the recommendations noted in this audit report.

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the relief association and, where appropriate, their responses have 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.

Timothy L. DeFoor Auditor General

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February 4, 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:

Municipality	County	2018	2019	2020
Conyngham Township	Columbia	\$2,823	\$3,027	\$3,073

Based on the relief association's records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2020 were \$61,903, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 24,522
Fair Value of Investments	37,381
Total Cash and Investments	\$ 61,903

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020 were \$1,643, 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. The scope of the Department's audit does not include the issuance of an opinion on the accuracy of these amounts.

Expenditures:

Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 440
Administrative Services:	
Other administrative expenses	\$ 144
Other Expenditures:	
Undocumented expenditures	\$ 1,059
Total Expenditures	\$ 1,643

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:

Aristes Fire Company

Locustdale Fire Company

Wilburton Fire Company No. 1

<u>Finding No. 1 – Undocumented Expenditures</u>

Condition: During the prior audit, the relief association was given a verbal observation for a \$95 undocumented expenditure to an unknown vendor on May 15, 2015, and relief association officials did not take corrective action to address the undocumented expenditure prior to the current audit period ending December 31, 2020.

In addition, the relief association was unable to provide adequate supporting documentation for the following expenditures made during the current audit period:

Date	Check No.	Payee Description			Amount
04/03/2018	148	Unknown vendor		\$	600
07/23/2018	149	Unknown vendor			359
11/08/2018	150	Unknown vendor			100
			Total	\$	1,059

Criteria: Section 7418(a) of the VFRA Act states:

The Office of Auditor General shall have the power and its duty shall be to audit the accounts and records of every volunteer firefighters' relief association receiving money under Chapter 7 of the Act of December 18, 1984 (P.L. 1005, No. 205), known as the Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard and Recovery Act, as far as may be necessary to satisfy the Auditor General that the money received was or is being expended for no purpose other than that authorized by this subchapter. Copies of all audits shall be furnished to the Governor.

Prudent business practice dictates that supporting documentation be maintained to evidence the propriety of all financial transactions.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officers indicated that this occurred due to the poor transfer of information, paperwork and archived materials after the untimely passing of the previous Treasurer, as well as lack of experience of the officers on what and how things are to be properly handled.

<u>Effect</u>: Lack of supporting documentation, such as invoices, itemized receipts and detailed minutes of meetings, made it impossible to determine if the expenditures were made in accordance with Section 7416(f) of the VFRA Act. In addition, the failure to maintain adequate supporting documentation for relief association expenditures can lead to an increased risk of errors occurring and funds being misappropriated.

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials provide this department with adequate supporting documentation, such as invoices and/or itemized receipts, to ensure the propriety of the expenditures or that the relief association be reimbursed \$1,154 for the undocumented expenditures. We also recommend that the relief association officials maintain supporting documentation for all future expenditures. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

Finding No. 2 – Failure To Maintain Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association failed to maintain Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on its authorized disbursing officer, as required by the VFRA Act. The relief association's Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage expired on November 8, 2018. As of December 31, 2020, the relief association's cash assets totaled \$24,522.

Criteria: Section 7415(c)(4) of the VFRA Act states, in part, that:

. . . the disbursing officer, whether designated treasurer, comptroller, financial secretary or otherwise, shall be bonded by corporate surety for faithful performance of duty. The amount of the bond shall be at least as great as the maximum cash balance in current funds of the association at any time during the fiscal year, and the premium on the bond shall be a proper charge against the funds of the association.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware of the VFRA Act provision requiring the maintenance of Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on the relief association's authorized disbursing officer.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the authorized disbursing officer of the relief association not being bonded, the relief association's cash assets were not adequately safeguarded.

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials obtain Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on the relief association's authorized disbursing officer in an amount greater than the relief association's maximum cash balance, as required by the VFRA Act. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

Finding No. 3 – Failure To Maintain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number

<u>Condition</u>: As cited as a verbal observation in our prior audit, the relief association failed to maintain a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number. Although the relief association did have its own sales tax exemption number, it expired on April 30, 2010, and is no longer valid. As a result, the relief association paid Pennsylvania sales tax in the amount of \$25.

Criteria: Section 7415(e) of the VFRA Act states:

A volunteer firefighters' relief association organized or conducted in accordance with the requirements of this section shall be regarded as a charitable corporation for all purposes, including the right to establish exemption from the operation of certain taxes.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they failed to apply for a sales tax exemption number from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue and did not provide a reason for why this occurred.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the relief association's failure to maintain a sales tax exemption number, the relief association may be required to pay Pennsylvania sales tax on their purchases, which ultimately reduces the funds otherwise available for general operating expenditures or for investment purposes.

Finding No. 3 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials immediately reapply for a new state sales tax exemption number from the Department of Revenue and furnish this exemption number to all vendors from whom the relief association purchases equipment. In addition, the relief association officials should seek reimbursement for the unauthorized sales tax expenditure of \$25. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

Finding No. 4 – Failure To Disclose A Related Party Transaction

<u>Condition</u>: Relief association officials failed to disclose a related party transaction to the relief association membership. During the current audit period, the relief association Treasurer was an independent subcontractor of an equipment vendor and the relief association expended \$440 in an equipment purchase from the vendor.

A related party transaction occurs when the relief association does business with a vendor that employs, subcontracts with or is owned by a relief association officer or a member of an officer's immediate family. Such a transaction may provide a less than arm's length financial benefit to such officer or member of such officer's immediate family through a commission or a profit from a sale.

<u>Criteria</u>: Best business practices dictate that all potential related party transactions should be disclosed to the membership and recorded in the minutes of relief association meetings. In addition, all officers and/or members involved with a business that is party to the related party transaction should abstain from all votes concerning such transactions.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware that related party transactions annual disclosure to the relief membership must be documented.

<u>Effect</u>: The failure to properly disclose a related party transaction may create potential conflicts of interest which could result in the relief association being involved in less than arm's length financial transactions.

Finding No. 4 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials take the actions necessary to eliminate the appearance of conflicts of interests. Actions should include, but are not limited to, written notification to the relief association membership for each related party transaction, and the abstention from decisions and voting rights by the relief association officials who are involved owners of businesses that have business dealings with the relief association. These actions should be documented in the relief association's minutes. Furthermore, the relief association officials should closely review all related party transactions to ensure that all transactions are at arm's length, i.e., the cost of the services rendered by the firm is competitive.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

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

Finding No. 5 – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

<u>Condition</u>: During the current audit engagement, we identified one check out of four checks drawn from the relief association's checking account that did not contain the proper signatory authority. The check contained the signatures of two relief association officers; however, neither of the two signatures were that of the disbursing officer as required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws.

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.

In addition, the relief association's bylaws at Article VII, Section 1 states:

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

Finding No. 5 – (Continued)

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.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association indicated they were not aware that the disbursing officer's signature was required as one of the two officer signatures needed for the disbursement of funds.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the relief association officers issuing checks without the signature of the disbursing officer, assets were placed at greater risk without the disbursing officer having the opportunity to verify the propriety of the expenditures.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure that the signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the Treasurer, are included on all relief association negotiable instruments as defined by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

<u>Finding No. 6 – Inadequate Financial Record-Keeping System And Inadequate Internal Controls</u>

<u>Condition</u>: As cited as a verbal observation in our prior audit, the relief association's financial record-keeping system did not establish adequate accounting procedures to allow the membership to effectively monitor the relief association's financial operations. The following are the noted deficiencies:

- A journal was not maintained to record the receipts and disbursements of the relief association.
- Ledgers were not utilized to record all relief association disbursements and receipts.
- Documentation to support various expenditures was not available for examination at the time of the audit.

In addition, the relief association has failed to establish adequate internal controls. The following conditions noted during the current audit period are indicative of internal control weaknesses:

- Original invoices were not required prior to the payment of purchases.
- Bank reconciliations were not performed.

<u>Criteria</u>: Section 7415(a) of the VFRA Act states:

A volunteer firefighters' relief association may be a body corporate, governed by a charter and bylaws or an unincorporated association of individuals governed by bylaws and a constitution. In either case, it 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.

In addition, an adequate system of accounting and record-keeping is a prerequisite for sound administration of relief association assets. Furthermore, prudent business practice also dictates that:

- Original invoices shall be required prior to payment of purchases and maintained to support expenditures.
- Monthly bank reconciliations should be performed.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware of their various record-keeping responsibilities and that a lack of understanding of the importance of adequate internal controls led to these internal control weaknesses.

Finding No. 6 – (Continued)

<u>Effect</u>: The failure of relief association officials to maintain adequate records prohibits the membership from effectively monitoring the relief association's financial operations. In addition, the failure to establish adequate internal controls prevented the relief association from adequately safeguarding its assets and the lack of effective internal controls places the relief association funds at greater risk for misappropriation.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again recommend that the relief association officials establish and maintain a financial record-keeping system that allows the membership to effectively monitor the relief association's financial operations. We also recommend that the relief association officials adopt internal control procedures which will require the following:

- Payment of purchases only after review of original invoices and maintainenance of invoices to support all expenditures.
- Performance of bank reconciliations on a monthly basis.

For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

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

Finding No. 7 – Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings

<u>Condition</u>: 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. In addition, the relief association's minutes were not signed and dated by the recording officer.

<u>Criteria</u>: 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.

Finding No. 7 – (Continued)

In addition, the relief association's bylaws at Article III, Section 4 states, in part:

Secretary – Shall keep records of all financial transactions discussed at association meetings.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware that maintaining detailed minutes of meetings was required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws. There was no reason provided for why the minutes were not signed and dated by the Secretary.

<u>Effect</u>: Without detailed minutes of meetings, evidence that relief association business was presented before the membership for approval does not exist. The lack of the Secretary's signature increases the risk of the relief association maintaining minutes that are not authentic minutes of meetings recorded by the Secretary.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials maintain detailed minutes of meetings, evidencing the discussion and approval of all financial-related business conducted by the relief association, and ensure that all meeting minutes are signed and dated by the Secretary of the relief association. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

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

Finding No. 8 – Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster

<u>Condition</u>: As cited as a verbal observation in prior audits, the relief association did not maintain a complete and accurate roster of equipment owned by the relief association. In addition, there was no indication that a physical inventory of equipment was conducted on an annual basis, nor whether such inventory accounted for all equipment owned by the relief association.

Finding No. 8 – (Continued)

<u>Criteria</u>: Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association should establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure the maintenance of a cumulative equipment roster of all items purchased by the relief association in order to provide an effective accounting control over the relief association's equipment. A cumulative equipment roster of all relief association equipment should include all of the following:

- Types of equipment purchased
- Dates of purchase
- Unit costs
- Names of suppliers
- Serial numbers, if applicable
- Current locations of items
- Final dispositions of sold or damaged equipment
- Evidence of the performance and results of an annual physical inventory

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials indicated they were unaware of what information was to be included on the equipment roster.

<u>Effect</u>: The failure to properly record equipment purchases in a detailed equipment roster prevents officials from effectively monitoring the relief association's equipment purchases. In addition, the failure to maintain a detailed equipment roster and perform an annual physical inventory of equipment prevents adequate accountability for, and safeguarding of, relief association equipment.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again recommend that the relief association officials maintain a cumulative equipment roster of all equipment owned by the relief association. Furthermore, the relief association should ensure it performs an annual physical inventory of all operable equipment and that the completion of the inventory be sufficiently documented. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

CONYNGHAM TOWNSHIP FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf

Governor Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Mr. Thomas Cook

Acting State Fire Commissioner

Conyngham Township Fireman's Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Joseph Pavloski

President

Mr. Marvin Honabach, Jr.

Secretary

Mr. Gregory Yeager

Treasurer

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

Ms. Linda L. Gregis

Secretary Conyngham 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.