

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Fairfield Hose Company Firefighters Relief Association of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Erie County For the Period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020

July 2021



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Dennis Gaydos, President
Fairfield Hose Company Firefighters Relief
Association of the Commonwealth
of Pennsylvania
Erie County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Fairfield Hose Company Firefighters Relief Association of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (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 objectives of the audit were:

1. To determine if the relief association took appropriate corrective action to address the finding contained in our prior audit report.
2. 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 objectives 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 objectives. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions.

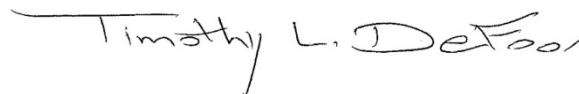
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020:

- The relief association did not take appropriate corrective action to address the finding contained in our prior audit report, as detailed below and discussed in the Status of Prior Finding section of this report.
- 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 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster

Finding No. 2 – Inappropriate Presigning Of Blank Checks

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

July 8, 2021

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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.

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

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Harborcreek Township	Erie	\$28,023	\$30,261	\$30,716

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association's records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2020 were \$383,999, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 126,207
Fair Value of Investments	122,834
Book Value of Other Investments	<u>134,958</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u>\$ 383,999</u>

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020 were \$111,921, 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	\$ 14,792
Relief benefits	<u>4,547</u>
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 19,339</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 71,578
Equipment maintenance	8,947
Training expenses	<u>5,800</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 86,325</u>
Administrative Services:	
Other administrative expenses	\$ 5,578
Bond premiums	<u>679</u>
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 6,257</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 111,921</u>

¹ 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 organization are separate, legal entities. The relief association is affiliated with the following fire service organization:

Fairfield Hose Company

FAIRFIELD HOSE COMPANY FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDING

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The relief association has not complied with the following prior audit finding. This finding is noted below and discussed in detail in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report:

- Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster

We are concerned by the relief association's failure to correct this previously reported audit finding. The relief association management should strive to implement the recommendation and corrective action noted in this audit report.

FAIRFIELD HOSE COMPANY FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain
A Complete and Accurate Equipment Roster**

Condition: The relief association failed to maintain a complete and accurate roster of equipment owned by the relief association. Although a listing of relief association owned equipment was provided during the current audit period, it was incomplete because it did not contain the names of suppliers (vendors), dates of purchase, cost of equipment and serial numbers to accurately identify equipment owned by the relief association. As such, it was impossible to determine if all equipment purchased during the audit period in the amount of \$71,578 was recorded. In addition, although relief officials provided information indicating that an annual physical inventory was completed, without a cumulative roster of equipment with all pertinent information, it is not known how this physical inventory inspection was performed.

A similar condition occurred in the prior audit.

Criteria: 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

Cause: The relief association stated that they have assigned numerous individuals to complete equipment inspection checks and, through the transition process of these new procedures, the equipment roster maintenance has not been properly completed.

Effect: The continued 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 inhibits the performance of a sufficiently documented annual physical inventory of equipment and prevents adequate accountability for, and safeguarding of, relief association equipment.

FAIRFIELD HOSE COMPANY FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

Recommendation: 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.

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: We are concerned by the relief association’s failure to correct this previously reported audit finding and strongly encourage timely implementation of the recommendation noted in this audit report.

Finding No. 2 – Inappropriate Presigning of Blank Checks

Condition: A review of the relief association’s checkbook, at the time of the audit engagement, revealed that three blank checks were presigned by one of the two relief association officers who are authorized to sign checks. The presigning of blank checks negates the relief association’s internal control over the disbursement process.

Criteria: Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association has sufficient internal control procedures in place to prohibit the presigning of blank checks. 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 signing the checks.

Cause: Relief officials stated that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, checks were presigned to prevent relief operations from being interrupted. Relief officials asserted that this was an isolated incident.

Effect: As a result of one of the two authorized relief association officers presigning the blank checks, assets were placed at greater risk of misappropriation since the officer who presigned the blank checks did not have the opportunity to verify the propriety of the expenditures.

FAIRFIELD HOSE COMPANY FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that the practice of presigning blank checks be immediately discontinued. We also recommend that all of the relief association officers ensure that checks are signed and co-signed only after the propriety of the expenditures have been determined and the payees, dates, and amounts to be paid have been confirmed. 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, those three checks were subsequently voided and destroyed.

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

FAIRFIELD HOSE COMPANY FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Fairfield Hose Company Firefighters Relief Association of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Governing Body:

Mr. Dennis Gaydos
President

Mr. Nicholas Kuchcinski
Vice President

Ms. Michelle Storicks
Investigator

Ms. Gina Morealli
Secretary

Mr. Alan Paulhamus
Treasurer

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

Mr. Dean Pepicello
Secretary
Harborcreek 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.