

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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## Ford Cliff Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association

Armstrong County, Pennsylvania

For the Period

January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022

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June 2023



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Ms. Elizabeth Rothen, President  
Ford Cliff Volunteer Firefighters'  
Relief Association  
Armstrong County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Ford Cliff Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022. 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, 2022, 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 fund, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding – Failure To Obtain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number

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  
May 18, 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 Code<sup>1</sup>, and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act<sup>2</sup> ("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 Law<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 72 P.S. § 403 Mr. Derek McKinley last amended by Act 44 of 2017).

<sup>2</sup> 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.* See specifically, 35 Pa.C.S. § 7418 Mr. Derek McKinley amended by Act 91 of 2020).

<sup>3</sup> 53 P.S. § 895.701 *et seq.* Mr. Derek McKinley Act 205 of 1984, as amended by Act 119 of 1990).

**BACKGROUND – (Continued)**

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

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Cadogan Township	Armstrong	\$ 177	\$ 180	\$ 159	\$ 194
Ford Cliff Borough	Armstrong	\$1,448	\$1,469	\$1,296	\$1,549
North Buffalo Township	Armstrong	\$2,476	\$2,501	\$2,211	\$2,539

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2022, was \$8,657, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 8,657</u>
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Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022, were \$28,328, 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.<sup>4</sup> **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	\$ 25,511
Equipment maintenance	945
Training expenses	205
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 26,661</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	\$ 675
Other administrative expenses	992
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 1,667</u>
Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 28,328</u></u>

<sup>4</sup> 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:

Ford Cliff Volunteer Fire Company

FORD CLIFF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

**Finding – Failure To Obtain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number**

Condition: As cited as a verbal observation in our prior audits, the relief association failed to obtain a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number. The relief association is currently using the fire service organization's sales tax exemption number, although the fire service organization and the relief association are separate legal entities.

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.

Cause: The relief association officials did not provide a reason why this occurred despite the relief association being notified through a verbal observation during our prior audit.

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

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials immediately obtain a 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. 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 have taken action to comply with the recommendation.

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



FORD CLIFF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

**The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro**  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Ford Cliff Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Governing Body:

**Ms. Elizabeth Rothen**  
President

**Mr. William Goodman**  
Vice President

**Ms. Jennifer Klukan**  
Secretary

**Mr. Derek McKinley**  
Treasurer

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

**Mr. Ronald A. Galinas**  
Secretary  
Cadogan Township

**Ms. Melissa Crawford**  
Secretary  
Ford Cliff Borough

**Ms. Pamela L. Bowser**  
Secretary  
North Buffalo Township

FORD CLIFF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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