

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Northumberland County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022

February 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Dominick Fernandez, President
Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters'
Relief Association
Northumberland County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2020, 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 objectives of the audit were:

1. To determine if the relief association took appropriate corrective action to address the findings 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 association 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.

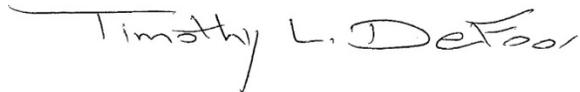
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022:

- The relief association did not take appropriate corrective action to address the findings 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 –
Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws

Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –
Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings

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
January 29, 2024

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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 relief association officers therefore have a responsibility to the public to conduct the relief association's financial affairs in a businesslike manner and to maintain sufficient financial records to support the propriety of all relief association transactions. Volunteer firefighters' relief association officers are also responsible for ensuring that the relief 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>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Marion Heights Borough	Northumberland	\$2,333	\$2,087	\$2,378*

*The 2022 state aid allocation was deposited by the relief association from Marion Heights Borough on November 28, 2022. As a result of our audit, the state aid was determined to be insufficiently allocated by \$290. The borough corrected their error by sending the remaining state aid allocation of \$290 to the relief association on October 17, 2023, and the relief association deposited the state aid allocation into a relief association account on the same day.

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2022, was \$9,570, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 9,570</u>
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BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022, were \$5,645, 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	\$ 3,045
Death benefits	300
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 3,345</u>
Fire Services:	
Training expenses	<u>\$ 300</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	\$ 300
Officer compensation	1,700
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 2,000</u>
Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 5,645</u></u>

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:

Marion Heights Hose Company

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

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws
- Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings

We are concerned by the relief association's failure to correct those previously reported audit findings. The relief association management should strive to implement the recommendations and corrective actions noted in this audit report.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws

Condition: The existing bylaws of the relief association still do not contain all of the provisions required by Section 7415(c) of the VFRA Act. Specifically, the bylaws do not define membership classification. The bylaws indicate certain benefits will be paid to “A” members of the association. However, the classification of “A” membership is still not defined anywhere in the contents of the bylaws.

A similar condition was noted in our prior three audit reports.

Criteria: Section 7415(c) of the VFRA Act states that the relief association’s bylaws shall:

- (1) Specify the requirements for securing membership, voting rights of different classes of members, if there be different classes, and conditions under which membership may be terminated.

Cause: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware of the mandatory bylaw provisions established by the VFRA Act despite the relief association being notified of this condition during our prior audit.

Effect: As a result of the mandatory provisions not being included in the bylaws, the relief association may have conducted its affairs without proper authorization.

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials review and update the bylaws governing their organization so that the bylaws meet the requirements set forth in the VFRA Act and properly authorize the operating procedures of the relief association. 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Minutes
Of Meetings**

Condition: The relief association failed to maintain detailed minutes of meetings as required by the VFRA Act. Specifically, the relief association's minutes did not address all financial-related transactions that occurred during the audit period. In addition, the meeting minutes did not contain an attendance record, or a sign-in sheet of members present to verify that quorum requirements were met, and the relief association business was conducted before the membership for approval.

A similar condition was noted in our prior audit report.

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:

Regular meetings of this association shall be held on the second Wednesday of each month immediately following the regular meeting of the Marion Heights Fire Company. Seven members shall constitute a quorum.

In addition, the relief association's bylaws at Article V, Section 1 states, in part:

Funds of this association shall not be expended for any purpose other than those authorized by the provisions of VFRA Act and the association bylaws. All expenditures must be approved by a majority vote at an association meeting and duly recorded in the minutes.

Cause: The relief association officials did not provide a reason why financial transactions were not addressed within the meeting minutes, and why the meeting minutes did not document attendance to verify the quorum requirements despite the relief association being notified of this condition during our prior audit.

Effect: Without detailed minutes of meetings, evidence that relief association business was presented before the membership for approval does not exist.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials maintain detailed minutes of meetings as required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws, evidencing the discussion and approval of all financial-related business conducted by the relief association and whether quorum requirements were met, and attendance appropriately documented. The minutes should include an adequate record of all financial-related business conducted by the relief association. 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Dominick Fernandez
President

Mr. David Bozza, Jr.
Vice President

Mr. Mark Zenyuch
Recording Secretary

Mr. Leo D. Finlan
Treasurer

Mr. Richard Pekera
Financial Secretary

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

Ms. Linda Gregis
Secretary
Marion Heights Borough

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.