

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association of Neshannock Township Lawrence County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022

June 2023



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Charles J. Chamberlain, President
Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association
of Neshannock Township
Lawrence County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association of Neshannock Township (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 funds, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding – Unauthorized Expenditures

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
April 21, 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.

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>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Neshannock Township	Lawrence	\$58,357	\$58,619	\$51,873	\$64,628

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2022, were \$119,526, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 75,279
Fair Value of Investments	<u>44,247</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u>\$ 119,526</u>

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022, were \$291,986, 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	\$ 108,497
Relief benefits	8,062
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 116,559</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 16,088
Equipment maintenance	32,661
Training expenses	5,040
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 53,789</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	<u>\$ 820</u>
Total Investments Purchased	<u>\$ 60,000</u>
Other Expenditures:	
Payments on loan	\$ 60,304
Unauthorized expenditures	514
Total Other Expenditures	<u>\$ 60,818</u>
Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 291,986</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:

Neshannock Township Volunteer Fire Company

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

VOLUNTEER FIREMEN’S RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF NESHANNOCK TOWNSHIP
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Unauthorized Expenditures

Condition: The relief association expended funds for the following items during the current audit period that are not authorized by the VFRA Act:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Check No.</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
09/30/20	1076	Affiliated fire company bond coverage	\$ 257
08/31/21	1080	Affiliated fire company bond coverage	257
		Total	<u>\$ 514</u>

Criteria: Section 7416(f) of the VFRA Act states:

The funds of any volunteer firefighters’ relief association may be spent:

- (1) To pay for such normal and reasonable running expenses as may be appropriate to the businesslike conduct of the affairs of the association, including legal fees, rental or purchase of offices, payment of reasonable compensation of employees and purchase of office equipment and supplies.

- (11) To purchase safeguards for preserving life, health and safety of volunteer firefighters to ensure their availability to participate in the volunteer fire service, including necessary training.

In addition, Section 7418(b) of the VFRA Act states:

- (b) Findings -- If the Auditor General finds that money received by a volunteer firefighters’ relief association has been expended for a purpose other than one authorized by this subchapter, the commissioner, upon receiving notice of the finding from the auditor general, shall decline to approve payment to the volunteer firefighters’ relief association until the improperly expended amount has been reimbursed to the relief association fund.

Costs associated with the purchase of the affiliated fire company bond insurance do not qualify as authorized volunteer firefighters’ relief association expenditures; consequently, these disbursements are not authorized under the VFRA Act.

Cause: The relief association officials indicated that the invoices were paid in error.

Effect: As a result of these improper expenditures, relief association funds were not available for investment purposes, or to pay for expenditures authorized by the VFRA Act.

VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF NESHANNOCK TOWNSHIP
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$514 for the unauthorized expenditures and that relief association officials become familiar with Section 7416(f) of the VFRA Act to aid them in determining the propriety of future expenditures. 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, the affiliated fire company reimbursed the relief association \$514 for the unauthorized expenditures on March 15, 2023.

Auditor's Conclusion: We reviewed documentation verifying that the reimbursement of \$514 was received. Compliance for expenditures made during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.

VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF NESHANNOCK TOWNSHIP
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association of Neshannock Township Governing Body:

Mr. Charles J. Chamberlain
President

Mr. Edward A. Harris
Secretary

Mr. Justin M. Bittner
Treasurer

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

Ms. Leslie S. Bucci
Secretary
Neshannock 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.