

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

North Strabane Township Volunteer Fire Department Firemen's Relief Association

Washington County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021

October 2022



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Ryan Fogarty, President
North Strabane Township Volunteer
Fire Department Firemen's
Relief Association
Washington County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the North Strabane Township Volunteer Fire Department Firemen's Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021. 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.

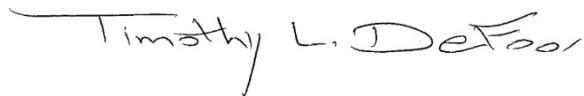
Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures, 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, 2019 to December 31, 2021:

- The relief association took appropriate corrective action to address the findings contained in our prior audit 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 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.



Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
September 26, 2022

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Background	1
Status of Prior Findings	4
Finding and Recommendation:	
Finding – Failure To Obtain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number	5
Report Distribution List	6

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.

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>
North Strabane Township	Washington	\$71,737	\$72,247	\$70,465
Nottingham Township	Washington	\$ 6,613	\$ 6,622	\$ 6,016

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)

Based on the relief association's records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2021 were \$147,333 as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 86,533
Fair Value of Investments	<u>60,800</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u>\$ 147,333</u>

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021 were \$275,825, 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	\$ 87,916
Relief benefits	<u>38,400</u>
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 126,316</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 80,524
Equipment maintenance	35,404
Training expenses	15,509
Fire prevention materials	<u>16,291</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 147,728</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	<u>\$ 1,781</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 275,825</u>

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

North Strabane Township Volunteer Fire Department

NORTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREMEN'S
RELIEF ASSOCIATION
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relief association has complied with the prior audit findings and recommendations, as follows:

- Failure To Deposit Proceeds From Equipment Sold

By receiving reimbursement of \$5,200 from the affiliated fire department from the sale of equipment and depositing the proceeds in a relief association account.

- Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

By requiring more than one signature on all negotiable instruments.

NORTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREMEN'S
RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Failure To Obtain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number

Condition: As cited as a verbal observation in 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 stated that this was an oversight on their part by not obtaining a sales tax exemption number from the Department of Revenue.

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 will take action to comply with the recommendation.

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

NORTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREMEN'S
RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Mr. Charles J. McGarvey, Sr.
State Fire Commissioner

North Strabane Township Volunteer Fire Department Firemen's Relief Association Governing
Body:

Mr. Ryan Fogarty
President

Mr. Douglas Zywan
Vice President

Mr. Josh Hofrichter
Secretary

Mr. Stephen Motzer
Treasurer

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

Mr. Andrew L. Walz
Secretary
North Strabane Township

Ms. Emilie J. Gadd
Secretary
Nottingham Township

NORTH STRABANE TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREMEN'S
RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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