

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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## Sigel Volunteer Fire Company Relief Association

Jefferson County, Pennsylvania

For the Period

January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022

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April 2023



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Robert Fye, President  
Sigel Volunteer Fire Company  
Relief Association  
Jefferson County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Sigel Volunteer Fire Company 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 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.

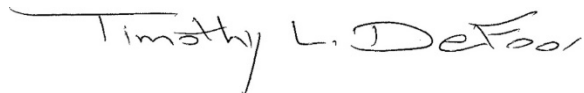
Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures, 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, 2020, 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 findings listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding No. 1 – Untimely Deposit Of State Aid

Finding No. 2 – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

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.

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  
March 23, 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 (as last amended by Act 44 of 2017).

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

<sup>3</sup> 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 municipalities:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Millstone Township	Elk	\$ 763	\$ 731	\$ 947
Barnett Township	Forest	\$1,562	\$1,411*	\$1,649*
Barnett Township	Jefferson	\$2,273	\$2,042	\$2,436
Eldred Township	Jefferson	\$6,746	\$6,080	\$7,631
Heath Township	Jefferson	\$1,442	\$1,270	\$1,560

\* The 2021 and 2022 state aid allocations received from Barnett Township (Forest County) were not deposited by the relief association until February 13, 2023, as disclosed in Finding No. 1 in this report.

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2022, was \$24,540, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 24,540</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 \$39,419, 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:

Benefit Services:	
Insurance premiums	\$ 4,582
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 23,893
Equipment maintenance	4,286
Training expenses	1,745
Fire prevention materials	521
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 30,445</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	\$ 300
Other administrative expenses	25
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 325</u>
Total Investments Purchased	<u>\$ 4,000</u>
Other Expenditures:	
Unauthorized sales tax paid *	<u>\$ 67</u>
Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 39,419</u></u>

\* During calendar year 2022, the relief association made insignificant disbursements in the amounts of \$3 and \$64, respectively, for the payment of sales tax on purchases that were not authorized under the VFRA Act. We disclosed these issues to relief association officials on March 3, 2023, but we did not include a finding in this report due to the relatively low dollar amount.

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<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:

Sigel Volunteer Fire Company



SIGEL VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 1 – Untimely Deposit Of State Aid**

Condition: The relief association did not deposit the 2021 and 2022 state aid allocations it received from Barnett Township (Forest County), in the amounts of \$1,411 and \$1,649, respectively, until February 13, 2023. The foreign fire insurance tax allocations were distributed to the municipal treasurers on September 21, 2021 and September 21, 2022, respectively, who forwarded the state aid to the relief association on October 31, 2021 and November 9, 2022, respectively, which is within 60 days of receipt, as required by Section 706 (b)(2) of the Act of December 18, 1984, (P.L. 1005, No. 205); however, upon receipt of the state aid allocations, the relief association did not ensure the funds were deposited timely into a relief association account.

Criteria: Section 706 (b)(2) of the Act of December 18, 1984, (P.L. 1005, No. 205), states:

The foreign fire insurance premium tax amount applicable to a municipality served solely by volunteer firefighters shall be paid to the municipality, which shall within 60 days of the date of the receipt of the moneys from the State Treasurer pay the amount received to the relief association fund of the fire department or departments, or fire company or companies, now existing or hereafter organized, inside or outside of the municipality, which is or are actively engaged in the service of the municipality and duly recognized by the governing body of the municipality.

Furthermore, prudent business practice dictates that upon receipt of its state aid allocation, the relief association should establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure the funds are deposited in a timely manner.

Cause: The relief association officials stated that the state aid allocation checks were issued payable to the fire company and not to the relief association which resulted in the original allocation checks being deposited into the affiliated fire company’s account.

Effect: As a result of the untimely deposit, funds were not available to pay general operating expenses or for investment purposes. In addition, an untimely deposit of receipts increases the risk that funds could be lost or misappropriated.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials adopt internal control procedures to ensure the timely deposit of all future income received. 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.

SIGEL VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 2 – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds**

Condition: During the current audit engagement, we identified five checks out of 60 checks drawn on the relief association’s checking account that did not contain the proper signatory authority. Four of the checks contained the signature of only the disbursing officer and one of the checks contained the signature of only the secretary, even though two signatures are required by the VFRA Act and the relief association’s bylaws. Issuing checks with the signature of only one relief association officer negates the relief association’s internal control over the disbursement process.

Criteria: Section 7415(c)(3) of the VFRA Act states, in part:

The bylaws shall require that the signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the disbursing officer, shall be required to bind the association by formal contract or to issue a negotiable instrument.

In addition, the relief association’s bylaws at Article IX, Section 2 states:

The signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the treasurer, shall be required for the issuance of relief association checks, withdraw from the association savings account, the redemption of any relief association investment or on any other negotiable instrument issued by the association.

Furthermore, prudent business practice dictates that the relief association has sufficient internal control procedures in place to ensure the signatures of at least two relief association officials are included on all negotiable instruments. 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 approving the checks.

Cause: The relief association officials stated that interruptions during the bill paying process resulted in all the appropriate signatures not being included on the checks.

Effect: As a result of the relief association officers issuing checks with only one signature, assets were placed at greater risk as expenditures were being made without a second relief association officer having the opportunity to verify the propriety of the expenditures. The application of the second signature, after evaluating the propriety of the expenditure, reduces the risk of misappropriation and the risk of errors occurring and going undetected. In addition, the one check without the signature of the disbursing officer, assets were placed at greater risk without the disbursing officer having the opportunity to verify the propriety of the expenditures.

SIGEL VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 2 – (Continued)**

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure that the signatures of at least two authorized relief association officers, one of whom shall be the Treasurer, are included on all relief association negotiable instruments as defined by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws. 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.

SIGEL VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

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

Sigel Volunteer Fire Company Relief Association Governing Body:

**Mr. Robert Fye**  
President

**Mr. William Macko**  
Vice President

**Ms. Teresa Gilbert**  
Secretary

**Ms. Barbara Austen**  
Treasurer

SIGEL VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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

**Ms. Amy Ellis**  
Secretary  
Millstone Township

**Ms. Michelle R. McDivitt-Stripe**  
Secretary  
Barnett Township (Forest County)

**Ms. Carrie D. Shields**  
Secretary  
Barnett Township (Jefferson County)

**Ms. Lisa Kelso**  
Secretary  
Eldred Township

**Ms. Jolene Hartle**  
Secretary  
Heath Township

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://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](mailto:news@PaAuditor.gov).