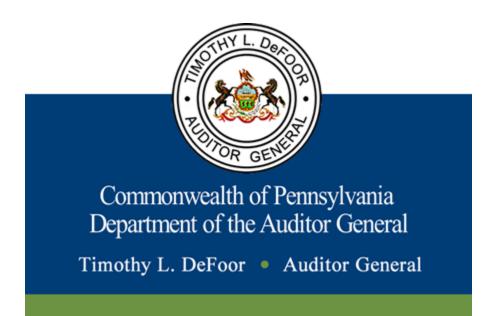
COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Wattsburg Hose Company Relief Association Erie County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021

September 2022





Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General Harrisburg, PA 17120-0018 Facebook: Pennsylvania Auditor General Twitter: @PAAuditorGen www.PaAuditor.gov

TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Marty J. Hamilton, President Wattsburg Hose Company Relief Association Erie County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Wattsburg Hose Company 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 one of the five findings contained in our prior audit report. However, the relief association failed to take appropriate corrective action to address the four remaining findings contained in our prior audit report, as listed below and discussed in the Status of Prior Findings section of this report.
- Because of the significance of the matters described in Finding Nos. 2 and 5 below and discussed later in this report, the relief association did not, in all significant respects, comply 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, collectively as a whole. Therefore, the relief association may be subject to the potential withholding of its upcoming state aid distribution, as discussed in the Potential Withhold of State Aid section of this report.

Finding No. 1	 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Undocumented Expenditure
Finding No. 2	 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Unauthorized Expenditures
Finding No. 3	 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster
Finding No. 4	 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings
Finding No. 5	 Failure To Deposit Proceeds From The Sale Of A Jointly Purchased Vehicle

Four of the five audit findings contained in this report cite conditions that existed in the operation of the relief association during the prior audit period and were not corrected during the current audit period. We are concerned by the number of findings noted and strongly encourage timely implementation of the recommendations noted in this audit report.

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.

Timothy L. Detaor

Timothy L. DeFoor Auditor General August 8, 2022

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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 municipalities:

Municipality	County	2019	2020	2021
Amity Township	Erie	\$ 5,529	\$ 5,565	\$ 5,004
Venango Township	Erie	\$12,727	\$12,795	\$11,396
Wattsburg Borough	Erie	\$ 1,603	\$ 1,624	\$ 1,448

Based on the relief association's records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2021 were \$73,536 as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 39,487
Fair Value of Investments	 34,049
Total Cash and Investments	\$ 73,536

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021 were \$85,766, 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	\$	15,447
Fire Services:		
Equipment purchased	\$	29,584
Equipment maintenance		17,678
Training expenses		5,855
Total Fire Services	\$	53,117
Administrative Services:		
Bond premiums	\$	300
Officer compensation		600
Other administrative expenses		133
Total Administrative Services	\$	1,033
Other Expenditures:		
Miscellaneous*	\$	13,954
Undocumented expenditures		1,630
Unauthorized expenditure		585
Total Other Expenditures	\$	16,169
Total Expenditures		85,766

* In November of calendar year 2019, the relief association made an erroneous return of reimbursement. The relief association later received a second reimbursement of \$13,954. Refer to Status of Prior Findings section of this report for additional information.

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:

Wattsburg Hose Company

WATTSBURG HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The relief association has complied with one of five prior audit findings and recommendations, as follows:

• Duplicate Payment

By receiving reimbursement of \$300 from an equipment vendor for the duplicate payment.

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

• <u>Undocumented Expenditures</u>

Although the relief association received reimbursement of \$8,000 on 10/25/20 and \$5,954 on 10/8/21 totaling \$13,954 from the affiliated fire company for the undocumented expenditures that were made in the prior audit period, the relief association again failed to provide adequate documentation to support all expenditures that occurred in the current audit period as further disclosed in Finding No. 1 of this report.

• <u>Unauthorized Expenditures</u>

The relief association did not receive reimbursement of \$4,752 from the affiliated fire company for the unauthorized expenditures that were made in prior audit periods. Further, the relief association expended funds in the current audit period that were not authorized by the VFRA Act as further disclosed in Finding No. 2 of this report.

- Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster
- 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.

<u>Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Undocumented</u> <u>Expenditures</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association was unable to provide adequate supporting documentation for the following expenditures made during the current audit period:

Date	Check No.	Payee Description			Amount
07/22/20 08/11/20	150 151	Administrative vendor Maintenance vendor		\$	106 147
08/17/20 10/15/21	152 210	Equipment vendor Training vendor			552 70
12/06/21	210	Training vendor			755
			Total	\$	1,630

A similar condition was noted in our prior audit report.

Criteria: Section 7418(a) of the VFRA Act states:

The Office of Auditor General shall have the power and its duty shall be to audit the accounts and records of every volunteer firefighters' relief association receiving money under Chapter 7 of the Act of December 18, 1984 (P.L. 1005, No. 205), known as the Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard and Recovery Act, as far as may be necessary to satisfy the Auditor General that the money received was or is being expended for no purpose other than that authorized by this subchapter. Copies of all audits shall be furnished to the Governor.

Prudent business practice dictates that supporting documentation be maintained to evidence the propriety of all financial transactions.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials did not have the documentation at the time of the audit despite the relief association being notified of a similar condition during our prior audit.

<u>Effect</u>: Lack of supporting documentation, such as invoices, itemized receipts and detailed minutes of meetings, made it impossible to determine if the expenditures were made in accordance with Section 7416(f) of the VFRA Act. In addition, the failure to maintain adequate supporting documentation for relief association expenditures can lead to an increased risk of errors occurring and funds being misappropriated.

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials provide this department with adequate supporting documentation, such as invoices and/or itemized receipts, to ensure the propriety of the expenditures or that the relief association be reimbursed \$1,630 for the undocumented expenditures. We again recommend that the relief association officials maintain supporting documentation for all future expenditures. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: 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.

<u>Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Unauthorized</u> <u>Expenditures</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association has not received reimbursement for expenditures made during the prior two audit periods for the following items that are not authorized by the VFRA Act:

Date	Check No.	Description	 Amount
02/24/2012	1051	Equipment vendor	\$ 4,000
02/24/2012	1052	Equipment vendor	696
12/23/2016	Debit	Tokens of Goodwill (non-relief member)	56

In addition, the relief association expended funds for the following item during the current audit period that is not authorized by the VFRA Act:

Total \$

4,752

Date	Check No.	Description		Amount
05/07/2019	121	Maintenance vendor	\$	585

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

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.
- (5) To pay the cost of procuring and forwarding tokens of sympathy and goodwill to a volunteer firefighter who may be ill or hospitalized as a result of participation in the fire service or who may die or who may be seriously ill for any reason.
- (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.

Costs associated with the purchase unauthorized equipment, tokens of goodwill, and maintenance of non-relief owned vehicles do not qualify as authorized volunteer firefighters' relief association expenditures; consequently, these disbursements are not authorized under the VFRA Act.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials did not provide a reason for why this occurred despite the relief association being notified of similar conditions during our prior two audits.

<u>Effect</u>: 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. Furthermore, the relief association's future state aid allocations may be withheld until the finding recommendation is complied with.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$4,752 for the unauthorized expenditures occurring during the prior audit period and we recommend that the association be reimbursed \$585 for unauthorized expenditures occurring during the current audit period, 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.

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: Due to the potential withhold of state aid, the relief association's compliance with the finding recommendation will be monitored subsequent to the release of the audit report and through our next audit of the relief association.

<u>Finding No. 3 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain</u> <u>A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association did not maintain a complete and accurate roster of equipment owned by the relief association. The list of equipment that was provided was incomplete and did not provide enough information to accurately determine the equipment owned by the relief association.

A similar condition was noted in our prior audit report.

<u>Criteria</u>: Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association should establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure the maintenance of a cumulative equipment roster of all items purchased by the relief association in order to provide an effective accounting control over the relief association's equipment. A cumulative equipment roster of all relief association equipment should include all of the following:

- Types of equipment purchased
- Dates of purchase
- Unit costs
- Names of suppliers
- Serial numbers, if applicable
- Current locations of items
- Final dispositions of sold or damaged equipment
- Evidence of the performance and results of an annual physical inventory

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials did not provide a reason for why this occurred despite the relief association being notified of this condition during our prior audit.

Finding No. 3 – (Continued)

<u>Effect</u>: The continued failure to properly record equipment purchases in a detailed equipment roster prevents officials from effectively monitoring the relief association's equipment purchases. In addition, the failure to maintain a detailed equipment roster and perform an annual physical inventory of equipment prevents adequate accountability for, and safeguarding of, relief association equipment.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again recommend that the relief association officials maintain a cumulative equipment roster of all equipment owned by the relief association. Furthermore, the relief association should ensure it performs an annual physical inventory of all operable equipment and that the completion of the inventory be sufficiently documented. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: 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.

<u>Finding No. 4 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Minutes</u> <u>Of Meetings</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association did not maintain minutes of meetings as required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws. Specifically, the relief association's minutes did not address all financial-related transactions that occurred during the audit period and the minutes were not signed by the secretary. In addition, the relief association was unable to provide evidence of minutes of meetings for all meetings that were held during the audit period.

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.

Finding No. 4 – (Continued)

The relief association's bylaws at Article III, Section 4 states:

The Secretary shall keep a true record of the proceedings of every meeting in the minutes. The Secretary shall also maintain an updated copy of the Associations Bylaws and make it available for review by the membership. The Secretary is responsible for providing representatives of the Department of the Auditor General with the Association's minutes of the Meetings and bylaws in connection with their auditing duties.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials stated that some meeting minutes were missing, and they did not know where the meeting minutes went. The relief association did not provide a reason why the minutes were not signed by the secretary.

<u>Effect</u>: Without maintaining detailed minutes of meetings for all meetings held that are signed by the secretary, evidence that relief association business was presented before the membership for approval does not exist.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again recommend that the relief association officials maintain a permanent record of all relief association meetings as required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws and that all meeting minutes be signed by the relief association secretary. 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.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: 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.

Finding No. 5 - Failure To Deposit Proceeds From The Sale Of A Jointly Purchased Vehicle

<u>Condition</u>: In 2011, the relief association expended \$15,000 towards the joint purchase of a 2011 Kenworth Truck with the affiliated fire company, which had a total cost of \$214,500. The relief association entered into an agreement with the affiliated fire company dated April 23, 2019, where the relief association would receive the pro-rata share percentage of 7% if the vehicle was ever sold. In 2021, relief association management stated that the jointly purchased vehicle was sold for \$10,000; however, the relief association failed to provide documentation of the sale of the vehicle and the sale price. In addition, the relief association did not receive and deposit proceeds for its proportional ownership interest from the sale of the jointly purchased vehicle.

Criteria: Section 7418(a) of the VFRA Act states:

The Office of Auditor General shall have the power and its duty shall be to audit the accounts and records of every volunteer firefighters' relief association receiving money under Chapter 7 of the Act of December 18, 1984 (P.L. 1005, No. 205), known as the Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard and Recovery Act, as far as may be necessary to satisfy the Auditor General that the money received was or is being expended for no purpose other than that authorized by this subchapter. Copies of all audits shall be furnished to the Governor.

Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association should secure its proportional ownership interest in the jointly purchased vehicle by executing a formal written agreement that enumerates the relief association's proportional share of financing. Such agreement shall specify that the relief association shall receive its prorated share of the proceeds upon sale of the vehicle, in the event the vehicle is ever sold. Once the vehicle is sold, the relief association officials should closely monitor all sales to ensure proceeds are received and timely deposited into a relief association account.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials stated they did not know where any documentation was for the sale. Relief association officials did not provide a reason why the relief association did not receive funds for its proportional ownership interest.

<u>Effect</u>: The failure to receive and deposit the proceeds from the sale of a jointly purchased vehicle with the affiliated fire company places the relief association's ownership interest at greater risk. As a result, the relief association was unable to use the funds for general operating expenses or for investment purposes. Furthermore, the relief association's future state aid allocations may be withheld until the finding recommendation is complied with.

Finding No. 5 – (Continued)

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association provide documentation evidencing the sale of the vehicle and the sales price of the vehicle. In addition, we recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$700 (7% of the indicated sales price) for its pro-rata share of the proceeds from the sale of the jointly purchased vehicle. We also recommend the relief association officials establish accounting and internal control procedures to ensure that all future proceeds resulting from the sale of a jointly purchased vehicle are timely deposited in a relief association account. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: 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.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: Due to the potential withhold of state aid, the relief association's compliance with the finding recommendation will be monitored subsequent to the release of the audit report and through our next audit of the relief association.

WATTSBURG HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

A condition of a repeat finding such as that reported by Finding No. 2 contained in this audit report may lead to a total withholding of state aid in the future unless that finding is corrected. Furthermore, a condition such as that reported by Finding No. 5 contained in this audit report may lead to a total withholding of state aid in the future unless that finding is corrected. However, such action may not be considered if sufficient documentation is provided within 60 days to verify compliance with this department's recommendations. Such documentation should be submitted by the relief association to: Department of the Auditor General, Bureau of Fire Relief Audits, Room 327 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120.

WATTSBURG HOSE COMPANY 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

Wattsburg Hose Company Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Marty J. Hamilton President

Ms. Kelly Hamilton Secretary

Ms. Anne Hall Treasurer

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

Ms. Valerie Jackson Secretary Amity Township

Mr. Michael C. Vogel Secretary Venango Township

Ms. Rosella E. Fenno Secretary Wattsburg Borough

WATTSBURG HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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