

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

West Hazleton Firemen's Relief Association

Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

For the Period

January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2021

February 2023



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Brandon Mark Cressman, President
West Hazleton Firemen's Relief Association
Luzerne County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the West Hazleton 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.

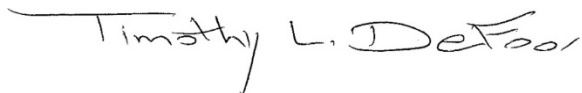
Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures,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

We were not able to obtain an independent confirmation of the cash balance directly from the financial institution. Therefore, while the relief association provided copies of bank statements that indicated that, as of December 31, 2021, the relief association had a cash balance of \$28,978, we were not able to verify this cash balance.

Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, except for the effects, if any, of the matter described in the preceding paragraph, 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.

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the relief association. 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 horizontal line above the first name.

Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
January 17, 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.

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>
West Hazleton Borough	Luzerne	\$20,154	\$20,340	\$18,544

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 as of December 31, 2021, was \$28,978, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 28,978</u>
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Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2021, were \$119,638, 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	\$ 14,452
Tokens of sympathy and goodwill	300
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 14,752</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 48,622
Equipment maintenance	16,535
Training expenses	5,657
Fire prevention materials	611
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 71,425</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	\$ 750
Other administrative expenses	1,136
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 1,886</u>
Other Expenditures:	
Payments on lease-financing	<u>\$ 31,575</u>
Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 119,638</u></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:

West Hazleton Fire Company No. 1

WEST HAZLETON 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:

- Unauthorized Debit Card Withdrawals Due To Potential Misappropriation Of Assets

By receiving reimbursement of \$5,630 from the affiliated fire company for the unauthorized expenditures made in the prior audit period.

- Undocumented Expenditures

By receiving reimbursement of \$5,009 from the affiliated fire company for the undocumented expenditures made in the prior audit period and by providing adequate documentation to evidence the propriety of the remaining \$1,030 of undocumented expenditures that were made in the prior audit period.

- Unauthorized Expenditures

By receiving reimbursement of \$9,328 from the affiliated fire company for the unauthorized expenditures made in the prior audit period.

We commend the relief association management for its efforts in complying with the findings and recommendations contained in the prior audit report. The relief association management should strive to remain in compliance with all applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures.

WEST HAZLETON FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

West Hazleton Firemen's Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Brandon Mark Cressman
President

Mr. James Kaschak, Jr.
Vice President

Mr. Ryan Herring
Recording Secretary

Mr. Anthony Colombo
Treasurer

Mr. Andy Rivera
Assistant Secretary

Ms. Marybeth Barbato
Assistant Treasurer

Mr. Richard Sparks
Trustee

Mr. Scott Herring
Trustee

Mr. Kyle Kaschak
Trustee

Mr. Jesse Frye
Trustee

Mr. Matthew Fairchild
Trustee

WEST HAZLETON FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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

Ms. Jane Mikulca
Secretary
West Hazleton 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.