

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Western Berks Fire Department Relief Association Berks County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021

April 2022



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Christopher Sayers, President
Western Berks Fire Department
Relief Association
Berks County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Western Berks Fire Department 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.

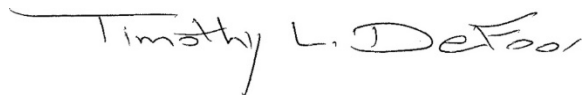
The objective of the audit was to determine if the relief association complied with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures as they relate to the receipt of state aid and the expenditure of relief association funds. Our audit was limited to the areas related to the objective 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.

We were not able to obtain an independent confirmation of a portion of the cash balance directly from the financial institution. Therefore, while the relief association provided bank statements that indicated that, as of December 31, 2021, the relief association had a cash balance of \$288,007, we were not able to verify a portion of 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, 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 few letters.

Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
March 24, 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:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
Lower Heidelberg Township	Berks	\$38,197	\$38,618	\$34,507
Sinking Spring Borough	Berks	\$20,234	\$20,077	\$20,917
South Heidelberg Township	Berks	\$37,925	\$44,039	\$39,614
Wernersville Borough	Berks	\$12,207	\$14,247	\$12,716

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2021 was \$288,007, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 288,007</u>
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BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021 were \$336,712, 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	\$ 27,320
Tokens of sympathy and goodwill	187
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 27,507</u>

Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 239,320
Equipment maintenance	37,220
Training expenses	23,714
Fire prevention materials	2,182
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 302,436</u>

Administrative Services:

Other administrative expenses	\$ 5,731
Bond premiums	1,038
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 6,769</u>

Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 336,712</u></u>
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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:

Western Berks Fire Department

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

WESTERN BERKS FIRE DEPARTMENT 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

Western Berks Fire Department Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Christopher Sayers
President

Mr. Jason Stine
Vice President

Mr. Avery Leshner
Secretary

Ms. Diana Porter
Treasurer

WESTERN BERKS FIRE DEPARTMENT 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. Pamela Stevens
Secretary
Lower Heidelberg Township

Ms. Elizabeth A. Eagelman
Secretary
Sinking Spring Borough

Ms. Tiffany L. Billingsley
Secretary
South Heidelberg Township

Ms. Debra A. Pierce
Secretary
Wernersville 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.