

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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The Wiconisco Fire Company Volunteer  
Fireman's Relief Association  
Dauphin County, Pennsylvania  
For the Period  
January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020

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June 2021



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General  
Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Alan Maurer, President  
The Wiconisco Fire Company Volunteer  
Fireman's Relief Association  
Dauphin County

We have conducted a compliance audit of The Wiconisco Fire Company Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association (relief association) pursuant to authority derived from Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, Act of April 9, 1929, (P.L. 343, No. 176), and mandated by the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act, as consolidated by the Act of November 23, 2010 (P.L. 1181, No. 118), at 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.*, for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020.

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, 2018 to December 31, 2020:

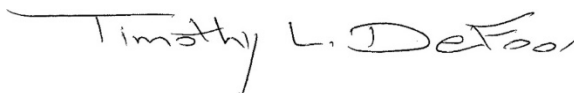
- The relief association failed to take appropriate corrective action to address the findings contained in our prior audit report, as listed below and discussed in the Status of Prior Findings section of this report.
- The relief association, in all significant respects, complied with applicable state 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 findings listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Unauthorized Expenditures

Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws (Discretionary Benefits)

Finding No. 3 – Failure To Maintain A Pennsylvania State Sales Tax  
Exemption Number

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.



Timothy L. DeFoor  
Auditor General

June 21, 2021

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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, Act of April 9, 1929, (P.L. 343, No. 176), and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act, as consolidated by the Act of November 23, 2010, (P.L. 1181, No. 118), at 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.*, 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, Act of December 18, 1984, (P.L. 1005, No. 205), as amended, 53 P.S. § 895.701 *et seq.* (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.

Act 118 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, Act 118 authorizes specific types of expenditures and prescribes appropriate volunteer firefighters' relief association investment options. Within the parameters established by Act 118, 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.

**BACKGROUND – (Continued)**

The relief association was allocated state aid from the following municipality:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Wiconisco Township	Dauphin	\$4,818	\$5,189	\$5,248

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2020 was \$7,093, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 7,093</u>
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Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020 were \$21,588, 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>1</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:	
Death benefits	<u>\$ 250</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 13,306
Equipment maintenance	4,979
Training expenses	<u>3,053</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 21,338</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 21,588</u>

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<sup>1</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:

Wiconisco Fire Engine Company No. 1

THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Unauthorized Expenditures
- Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws (Discretionary Benefits)

We are concerned by the relief association's failure to correct these previously reported audit findings. The association management should strive to implement the recommendations and corrective actions noted in this audit report.



THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Unauthorized Expenditures**

Condition: Although the relief association received partial reimbursement of \$9,613 from the affiliated fire company for the unauthorized expenditures that were made in the prior audit period, the relief association officials did not take corrective action to address the remaining prior audit unauthorized expenditures of \$974, which were for the purchase of commercial insurance policies of the affiliated fire company, prior to the current audit period ending December 31, 2020.

Criteria: Act 118 at 35 Pa.C.S. § 7416(f)(1,2,8,12) 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.
- (2) To purchase contracts of insurance which, at a minimum, shall afford financial assistance to active members of the fire service represented by the association against losses due to injury suffered in the fire service and may also provide, in the order named: (i) for payments to the surviving spouse or other dependents of a member in the event of member's death; (ii) for protection of active firefighters against disease; (iii) for replacement or purchase of prosthetic devices such as visual aids, hearing aids, dentures, braces, crutches and the like, where those devices have been lost or damaged while the owner was engaged in the fire service or where the need for those devices arose because of functional impairment attributable to participation in the fire service; (iv) for repair or replacement, if necessary, of articles of clothing or pocket pagers damaged or lost in the course of participation in the fire service; and (v) for disability incurred after service for a minimum of 20 years as a volunteer firefighter.
- (8) To contribute to or to purchase contracts of insurance which will contribute to the cost of rehabilitating and retraining volunteer firefighters who, by reason of their participation in the fire service, have suffered a major impairment of the ability to continue their vocation.

THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 1 – (Continued)**

Costs associated with the purchase of commercial insurance policies of the fire company does not qualify as authorized volunteer firefighters' relief association expenditures; consequently, these disbursements are not authorized under Act 118.

Cause: The relief association officials did not provide a reason for why they failed to seek reimbursement for the remaining amount of unauthorized expenditures during the current audit period.

Effect: As a result of failing to seek the reimbursement of prior unauthorized expenditures, relief association funds were not available for investment purposes, or to pay for expenditures authorized by Act 118.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$974 for the remaining prior audit unauthorized expenditures and that relief association officials become familiar with Act 118 at 35 Pa.C.S. § 7416(f) 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.

Management's Response: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and, as a result of our audit, the affiliated fire company reimbursed the relief association \$974 for the remaining prior audit unauthorized expenditures on June 9, 2021.

Auditor's Conclusion: We reviewed documentation verifying that the reimbursement of \$974 was received. Compliance for expenditures made during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.

**Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws (Discretionary Benefits)**

Condition: The existing bylaws of the relief association do not contain all of the provisions required by Section 7415(c) of Act 118. Specifically, the bylaws do not address the disbursement of death benefits.

A similar condition was noted in our prior audit report.

THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 2 – (Continued)**

During the current audit period, the relief association paid a \$250 death benefit to a member of the relief association. Although these expenditures were authorized by Act 118, the types, amounts, and criteria to be met before receiving the benefits were not described in a formal policy approved by the association membership.

Criteria: Section 7415(c) of Act 118 states that the relief association's bylaws should include the following provisions:

- (10) Contain such other provisions as may, to the membership, seem appropriate or necessary to the orderly conduct of affairs of the association.

In addition, Section 7413 of Act 118 states that funds shall be available:

- (3) For payment, either by insurance or by operation of a beneficial fund, of a sum certain to designated beneficiaries of a participating member following the death of a member for any cause and to establish criteria which members must meet in order to qualify as participants in a death benefit fund. (Emphasis added.)

Furthermore, prudent business practice dictates that when a relief association offers death benefits, or any other type of discretionary benefit provided by Act 118, it should establish a precedent for those benefits being offered. Such a precedent should be documented in the bylaws, a formal association policy, or in the official meeting minutes. The formal approval is necessary to clarify the types and amounts of benefits offered to its membership as well.

Cause: The relief association officials stated this occurred due to lack of communication within the association to address the issue.

Effect: As a result of the continued exclusion of the mandatory provisions from the bylaws, the relief association may have conducted its affairs without proper authorization. In addition, the relief association's failure to formally define discretionary benefits prevents the membership from being aware of the types and amounts of benefits offered to its membership. The absence of formal approval increases the risk of unauthorized expenditures and could also lead to benefits not being applied equally to all members of the association.

THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 2 – Continued**

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials review and update the bylaws governing their organization so that the bylaws meet the requirements set forth in Act 118 and properly authorize the operating procedures of the relief association. 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 a Bylaws committee has already been formed and the bylaws are in the process of being amended.

Auditor's Conclusion: 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. 3 – Failure To Maintain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number**

Condition: The relief association failed to maintain a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number. Although the relief association did have its own sales tax exemption number, it expired on May 31, 2008, and is no longer valid.

Criteria: Section 7415(e) of Act 118 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: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware that the relief association needed its own unique sales tax exemption number separate from the fire company.

Effect: As a result of the relief association's failure to maintain a sales tax exemption number, the relief association may be required to pay Pennsylvania sales tax on their purchases, which ultimately reduces the funds otherwise available for general operating expenditures or for investment purposes.

THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding No. 3 – (Continued)**

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials immediately reapply for a new 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.

THE WICONISCO FIRE COMPANY VOLUNTEER FIREMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

**The Honorable Tom W. Wolf**  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The Wiconisco Fire Company Volunteer Fireman's Relief Association Governing Body:

**Mr. Alan Maurer**  
President

**Mr. Keith Ramer**  
Vice President

**Mr. Ronald Pinchorski**  
Secretary

**Mr. Bill Kaster**  
Treasurer

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

**Ms. Candice R. Fausnacht**  
Secretary  
Wiconisco 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).