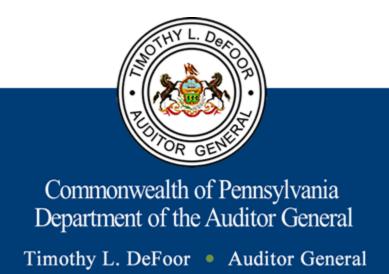
# **COMPLIANCE AUDIT**

# Wrightsville Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association Warren County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022

July 2024





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. Dale Johnson, President Wrightsville Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association Warren County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Wrightsville Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2019, 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 objectives of the audit were:

- 1. To determine if the relief association took appropriate corrective action to address the finding 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 association 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, 2022:

- The relief association did not take appropriate corrective action to address the finding contained in our prior audit report, as detailed below, and discussed in the Status of Prior Finding 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	<ul> <li>Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster</li> </ul>
Finding No. 2	<ul> <li>Undocumented Expenditures</li> </ul>
Finding No. 3	<ul> <li>Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds</li> </ul>
Finding No. 4	<ul> <li>Relief Association Checking Account Inappropriately Registered Under Affiliated Fire Service Organization's Federal Tax Identification Number</li> </ul>
Finding No. 5	<ul> <li>Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings And Relief Association Bylaws</li> </ul>
Finding No. 6	<ul> <li>Inadequate Financial Record-Keeping System</li> </ul>
Finding No. 7	<ul> <li>Failure To Maintain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number</li> </ul>

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. Detoor

Timothy L. DeFoor Auditor General May 15, 2024

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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 relief association officers therefore have a responsibility to the public to conduct the relief association's financial affairs in a businesslike manner and to maintain sufficient financial records to support the propriety of all relief association transactions. Volunteer firefighters' relief association officers are also responsible for ensuring that the relief 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 municipalities:

Municipality	County	2019	2020	2021	2022
Freehold Township	Warren	\$3,087	\$3,116	\$2,803	\$2,932
Pittsfield Township	Warren	\$1,635	\$1,649	\$1,489	\$1,711

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 72 P.S. § 403 (as last amended by Act 44 of 2017).

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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 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, 2022, was \$15,493, as illustrated below:

Cash \$ 15,493

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022, were \$11,335, 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	\$	2,138
Fire Services:		
Equipment purchased		3,710
Equipment maintenance	·	922
Training expenses		3,325
Total Fire Services	\$	7,957
Administrative Services:		
Bond premiums		300
Other administrative expenses		6
Total Administrative Services		306
Other Expenditures:		
Undocumented expenditures – See Finding No 2		852
Unauthorized expenditure *	Ť	82
Total Other Expenditures		934
Total Expenditures		11,335

<sup>\*</sup> During calendar year 2022, the relief association made a \$82 disbursement that was not authorized under the VFRA Act. We disclosed this issue to relief association officials on February 9, 2024, but we did not include a finding in this report due to the relatively low dollar amount.

<sup>&</sup>lt;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:

Wrightsville Volunteer Fire Department

# WRIGHTSVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RELIEF ASSOCIATION STATUS OF PRIOR FINDING

# NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The relief association has not complied with the following prior audit finding. This finding is noted below and discussed in detail in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report:

• Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster

We are concerned by the relief association's failure to correct this previously reported audit finding. The relief association management should strive to implement the recommendation and corrective action noted in this audit report.

# <u>Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain</u> <u>A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association failed to maintain a complete and accurate roster of equipment owned by the relief association. Specifically, the relief association purchased \$3,710 of equipment during the current audit period and there was no equipment roster created or maintained for these purchases. In addition, the relief association purchased \$1,496 of equipment during the prior audit period that was not properly accounted for. Furthermore, there was no indication that a physical inventory of equipment was conducted on an annual basis to account for the equipment owned by the relief association.

<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 and perform and document an annual physical inventory of all operable equipment 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 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 stated that they had complied with our recommendation, but the complete roster had been accidently discarded.

<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.

#### **Finding No. 1 – (Continued)**

<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.

#### Finding No. 2 – Undocumented Expenditures

<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	
01/13/2019 03/29/2019	1116 1122	Training vendor Training vendor		\$	520 88	
12/23/2019 05/17/2021	1129 1143	Member reimbursement – training Training vendor			185 14	
03/03/2022	1146	Member reimbursement – training			45	
			Total	\$	852	

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.

## **Finding No. 2 – (Continued)**

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

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials stated that they had maintained all documentation but had accidently discarded some of the expenditure documentation.

<u>Effect</u>: Lack of supporting documentation, such as invoices and itemized receipts, 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.

<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 \$852 for the undocumented expenditures. We also 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.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

## Finding No. 3 – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

<u>Condition</u>: During the current audit engagement, we identified three checks out of 32 checks drawn on the relief association's checking account that only contained the signature of one officer (the Relief Association Treasurer), 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.

## **Finding No. 3 – (Continued)**

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 IV states:

The signature of two officers one of which shall be treasure [*sic*] will be required for the deposit and withdrawal from the association accounts.

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.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials stated it was an oversight by the officers.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the relief association officer issuing checks with only one authorized 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 authorized signature, after evaluating the propriety of the expenditure, reduces the risk of misappropriation and the risk of errors occurring and going undetected.

<u>Recommendation</u>: 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.

<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.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

## <u>Finding No. 4 – Relief Association Checking Account Inappropriately Registered Under</u> <u>Affiliated Fire Service Organization's Federal Tax Identification Number</u>

<u>Condition</u>: As of December 31, 2022, the relief association held a checking account, with a total balance of \$15,493 which was inappropriately registered under the fire company's federal tax identification number rather than the relief association's identification number. This represents 100 percent of the relief association's cash assets.

<u>Criteria</u>: Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association maintain ownership of all funds as a means of safeguarding its assets from unauthorized use or disposition.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials were of the belief that the checking account was properly registered with the relief association's federal tax identification number and were unaware of the error.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the funds being inappropriately registered under another entity's federal tax identification number, these relief association assets were not properly safeguarded.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials secure ownership rights to all monetary assets. This requirement can be accomplished by ensuring that all funds are registered under the relief association's federal tax identification number. 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, as a result of our audit, the relief association changed their federal tax identification number at their financial institution effective January 30, 2024.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: We reviewed documentation verifying that the federal tax identification was changed at the relief association's financial institution. Compliance for proper federal tax identification numbers on all relief association accounts will be subject to verification through our next audit.

#### Finding No. 5 – Inadequate Minutes Of Meetings And Relief Association Bylaws

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association failed to maintain detailed 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, there were no meetings held during calendar year 2021, and the meeting minutes did not contain an attendance record, or a sign-in sheet of members present, to verify those members who participated in the meeting ensured a quorum of membership was present and the relief association business was conducted before the membership for approval. Furthermore, the existing bylaws of the relief association contains language to conduct business pertaining to the disbursement of funds that is based on Act 84 of June 11, 1968. The relief association has not updated the bylaws to govern their organization to meet the requirements set forth in the VFRA Act.

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.

The relief association's bylaws at Article II, Section I states:

The regular meeting of the association shall be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday quarterly preceding the regular monthly meeting. A quorum of five is needed to constitute a meeting.

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

Secretary: The secretary will keep records of all meetings in the minute book. The minute book will show all financial transaction [*sic*] and other pertinent business discussed.

In addition, the relief association's bylaws at Article IV, Section II states:

Funds of this association shall not be expended for any purpose other than those authorized by the provisions of act 84 [*sic*] and the association bylaws.

Prudent business practice dictates that an attendance record, or a sign-in sheet of members present, to verify those members who participated in the meeting is maintained with the meeting minutes to ensure a quorum of membership was present and the relief association business was conducted before the membership for approval.

## **Finding No. 5 – (Continued)**

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials stated that meetings were not held in 2021 due to the Covid - 19 pandemic. In addition, the relief association officials indicated that they were unaware that maintaining detailed minutes of meetings was required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws. Furthermore, the relief association officials did not provide a reason why financial transactions were not addressed within the meeting minutes, why the meeting minutes did not document attendance or why the bylaws were not updated to meet the requirements of the VFRA Act.

<u>Effect</u>: Without holding regular meetings and maintaining detailed minutes of meetings, evidence that relief association business was presented before the membership for approval with proper quorum requirements does not exist. As a result of the relief association not updating the bylaws to meet the appropriate requirements, the relief association may have conducted its affairs without proper authorization.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials hold all required meetings and maintain detailed minutes of meetings as required by the VFRA Act and the relief association's bylaws, evidencing the discussion and approval of all financial-related business conducted by the relief association and whether quorum requirements were met. In addition, we recommend that the relief association officials remove the language referring to Act 84 by updating the bylaws governing their organization so that the bylaws meet the requirements set forth in the VFRA Act. 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 did not agree with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference in regard to listing members in attendance and stated that they were unaware of the need to update the bylaws to reflect the current VFRA Act.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: As stated in the Criteria, an attendance record, or a sign-in sheet of members present, should be maintained with the meeting minutes. Full compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

## Finding No. 6 – Inadequate Financial Record-Keeping System

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association's financial record-keeping system did not establish adequate accounting procedures to allow the membership to effectively monitor the relief association's financial operations. The following are the noted deficiencies:

- A journal was not maintained to record the receipts and disbursements of the relief association.
- Ledgers were not utilized to record the transactions of the relief association accounts.
- Documentation to support various expenditures was not available for examination at the time of the audit.

Criteria: Section 7415(a) of the VFRA Act states:

A volunteer firefighters' relief association may be a body corporate, governed by a charter and bylaws or an unincorporated association of individuals governed by bylaws and a constitution. In either case, it 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.

In addition, an adequate system of accounting and record-keeping is a prerequisite for sound administration of relief association assets.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials stated that they accidentally threw away all financial related documents.

<u>Effect</u>: The failure of relief association officials to maintain adequate records prohibits the membership from effectively monitoring the relief association's financial operations.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We recommend that the relief association officials establish and maintain a financial record-keeping system that allows the membership to effectively monitor the relief association's financial operations. 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.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

## Finding No. 7 – Failure To Maintain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number

<u>Condition</u>: As cited as verbal observation in previous audits, 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 October 31, 2010, and is no longer valid. The relief is currently using the affiliated fire company's sales tax exemption number.

Criteria: Section 7415(e) of the VFRA Act 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.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware that its sales tax exemption number from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue had expired.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the relief association's continued 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.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again 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.

<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.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

## WRIGHTSVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RELIEF ASSOCIATION REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

#### The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro

Governor Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Wrightsville Volunteer Fire Department Relief Association Governing Body:

## Mr. Dale Johnson President

#### Ms. Wanda Smith Treasurer

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

#### Ms. Sally Pondel Secretary Freehold Township

#### Ms. Taryne Lewis Secretary Pittsfield Township

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at <u>www.PaAuditor.gov.</u> 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: <u>news@PaAuditor.gov</u>.