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Auditor General DePasquale Finds More Financial Problems at Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association

Calls for District Attorney to investigate, Attorney General to dissolve problematic VFRA in Delaware County

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said today that he is calling for the Delaware County District Attorney to investigate nearly \$140,000 in questionable expenses at the Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association.

This is the second time DePasquale requested an investigation into this relief association. He referred his 2015 audit of the relief association to the Delaware County District Attorney's Office after discovering nearly \$90,000 in undocumented and unauthorized expenses, among other findings. That investigation resulted in charges against two relief association officers.

His latest audit discovered \$137,070 in new, undocumented expenses, including payments toward golf and country clubs, entertainment, department stores, cable television, unknown vendors and unexplained cash withdrawals to individuals. The questionable expenses were found during an examination of relief association operations from Jan. 1, 2015 to Aug. 29, 2017.

"Golf courses. Cable bills. Department stores. Disc jockeys. People withdrawing money without explanation. I have serious concerns about how tax dollars were spent here," DePasquale said. "I have asked the district attorney to help get to the bottom of this potential abuse of public funds."

DePasquale will ask the Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General to begin immediate legal action to dissolve the Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association and to oversee the transfer of taxpayer-funded fire equipment and assets to a legitimate volunteer firefighter relief association. The Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association has not supported an affiliated fire company since 2016.

"Considering the results of this audit, this relief association needs to be shut down and all taxpayer assets must be transferred to a credible relief association," DePasquale said. "There is a black cloud hovering over the Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association. We need to clear the air in the interests of taxpayers and quality emergency services."

DePasquale said he was troubled that the relief association did not take action to correct seven findings identified in the 2015 audit and that auditors could not find relief association officers to review the latest audit results.

Because of previous and ongoing issues, DePasquale has been withholding state funding from the Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association since 2015.

The latest audit found unexplained expenses to cable/internet vendors, golf and country club vendors, DJ entertainment vendors, cell phone costs, bank counter/cash withdrawals and checks issued to unknown payees. They include:

- \$17,243 in **over-the-counter cash withdrawals**;
- \$6,914 to **individuals**;
- \$6,056 to **unknown vendors**;

- \$4,140 to **golf and country club** vendors;
- \$325 to **DJ Entertainment**;
- \$476 to **department store** vendors;
- \$940 in **TV and Radio Services**;
- \$2,509 in **cable and internet**;
- \$7,613 for **utilities**;
- \$57,007 to the **fire company**
- \$5,459 to the **Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency**
- \$35 in **shoe repair**
- \$684 in **cell phone** costs.

“We did not have enough documentation to determine if any of these expenses were legal,” DePasquale noted. “Clearly, some of these expenses are not allowed. I do not know how golf and country club vendors advance the cause of volunteer firefighting services.”

In the past, DePasquale has referred troublesome audits to law enforcement, including:

- In February, DePasquale asked the Allegheny County District Attorney to investigate \$250,000 in undocumented expenses his auditors found at the Castle Shannon Volunteer Firemen’s Relief Association.
- In July 2017, DePasquale asked the Lackawanna County District Attorney’s Office to investigate \$30,000 in undocumented and unauthorized expenses at the Jefferson Township Volunteer Ambulance Association Relief Association. As a result, two VFRA officers were each charged with 189 theft-related crimes.
- In December 2015, DePasquale asked the Delaware County District Attorney to investigate \$88,610 in undocumented and unauthorized expenses at the Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association. As a result, two VFRA officers were each charged with eight theft-related crimes.

The Colwyn Borough Fire Company Relief Association audit report is available online at:
www.PaAuditor.gov.

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