

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Fredonia Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association

Mercer County, Pennsylvania

For the Period

January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023

July 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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. William Ringer, Jr., President
Fredonia Volunteer Firemen's
Relief Association
Mercer County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Fredonia Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023. 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.

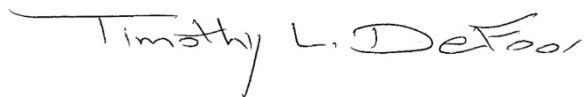
Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief association funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative 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, 2021, to December 31, 2023:

- 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 finding listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure
To Segregate Relief Association Officers’ Duties

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the relief association and, where appropriate, their response has been included in the report.



Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
July 1, 2024

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Background	1
Status of Prior Finding	3
Finding and Recommendation:	
Finding – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Segregate Relief Association Officers’ Duties	4
Report Distribution List	6

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 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:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
Delaware Township	Mercer	\$6,788	\$7,864	\$8,196
Fairview Township	Mercer	\$4,841	\$5,486	\$5,353
Fredonia Borough	Mercer	\$1,742	\$1,905	\$1,916

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, 2023, was \$26,390, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 26,390
------	-----------

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023, were \$38,250, 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	\$ 6,079
--------------------	----------

Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 28,342
Equipment maintenance	1,258
Training expenses	1,459
Total Fire Services	\$ 31,059

Administrative Services:

Bond premiums	\$ 252
Other administrative expenses	860
Total Administrative Services	\$ 1,112

Total Expenditures	\$ 38,250
--------------------	-----------

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:

Fredonia Volunteer Fire Department

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

FREDONIA VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S 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 Finding and Recommendation section of this report:

- Failure To Segregate Relief Association Officers' Duties

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.

FREDONIA VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Segregate Relief Association Officers' Duties

Condition: During the current audit, we detected that the same individual holds the position of both Secretary and Treasurer.

A similar condition was noted in our prior audit report.

Criteria: Prudent business practice dictates that the duties of the Secretary and Treasurer be sufficiently segregated. An adequate segregation of duties is the primary internal control intended to prevent or decrease the risk of errors or irregularities.

The minimum requirements of the Secretary's position, pertaining to a relief association, are to maintain detailed minutes of meetings authorizing the relief association's financial operations. The Secretary should review and coordinate the amending of the bylaws governing the relief association so that the bylaws meet the minimum requirements of the VFRA Act.

The minimum requirements of the Treasurer's position, pertaining to a relief association, are to maintain an account of all funds belonging to the relief association. The Treasurer shall maintain a journal and ledger detailing all financial transactions of the relief association along with documentation supporting the receipts and disbursements. The Treasurer should co-sign all negotiable instruments along with another relief association officer. Also, financial statements should be prepared at least on an annual basis by the Treasurer.

Cause: The relief association officials did not provide a reason why this occurred despite the relief association being notified of this condition during our prior audit.

Effect: An inadequate segregation of duties could prevent relief association officials and members from effectively monitoring the relief association's financial transactions. Additionally, it negates the checks and balances necessary to detect and correct financial errors or irregularities in the relief association's accounting system.

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials ensure that there is adequate segregation of duties between the Relief Association's Secretary and Treasurer. We also recommend that the relief association officials review its accounting and internal control procedures to ensure that the duties being performed by the Secretary and Treasurer are sufficiently segregated so that relief association assets are adequately safeguarded. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

FREDONIA VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – (Continued)

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: 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.

FREDONIA VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Fredonia Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. William Ringer, Jr.
President

Mrs. Suzette Ringer
Secretary/Treasurer

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

Ms. Janice M. Boyd
Secretary
Delaware Township

Ms. Robin L. Hostetler
Secretary
Fairview Township

Mrs. Suzette Ringer
Secretary
Fredonia 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.