

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Cochran Hose Company Relief Association Allegheny County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023

August 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Jed Von Hofen, President
Cochran Hose Company
Relief Association
Allegheny County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Cochran Hose Company 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.

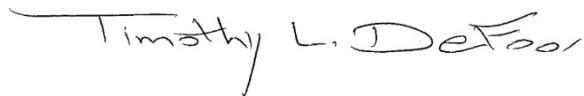
Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief association funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative 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 took appropriate corrective action to address the finding contained in our prior audit 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 – Insufficient Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage

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. 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
August 6, 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 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>
Edgeworth Borough	Allegheny	\$17,851	\$22,500	\$21,894
Glen Osborne Borough	Allegheny	\$ 4,125	\$ 5,232	\$ 5,000
Haysville Borough	Allegheny	\$ 349	\$ 467	\$ 454
Sewickley Borough	Allegheny	\$27,330	\$34,264	\$34,034

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 and investments as of December 31, 2023, were \$1,646,714, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 411,439
Fair Value of Investments	<u>1,235,275</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u><u>\$ 1,646,714</u></u>

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023, were \$854,153, 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	<u>\$ 89,107</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 213,514
Equipment maintenance	75,002
Training expenses	2,550
Fire prevention materials	<u>4,469</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 295,535</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	\$ 955
Officer compensation	1,575
Other administrative expenses	<u>127</u>
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 2,657</u>
Total Investments Purchased	<u>\$ 466,854</u>
Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 854,153</u></u>

⁴ 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:

Cochran Hose Company Inc.

COCHRAN HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDING

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The relief association has complied with the prior audit finding and recommendation, as follows:

- Improper Equipment Donation Transaction

By discontinuing the practice of donating relief association-owned equipment to any organization other than to another relief association.

COCHRAN HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Insufficient Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage

Condition: The relief association did not maintain a Surety (Fidelity) bond in a sufficient amount to cover the relief association’s authorized disbursing officer. The relief association’s Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage amount was \$300,000; however, as of December 31, 2023, the relief association’s cash assets totaled \$411,439.

Criteria: Section 7415(c)(4) of the VFRA Act states, in part, that:

. . . the disbursing officer, whether designated treasurer, comptroller, financial secretary or otherwise, shall be bonded by corporate surety for faithful performance of duty. The amount of the bond shall be at least as great as the maximum cash balance in current funds of the association at any time during the fiscal year, and the premium on the bond shall be a proper charge against the funds of the association.

Cause: Relief association officials indicated that they did not realize that cash in investment accounts is included with the bond coverage limit.

Effect: As a result of the authorized disbursing officer of the relief association being insufficiently bonded, the relief association’s cash assets were not adequately safeguarded.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials ensure that its Surety (Fidelity) bond sufficiently covers the relief association’s authorized disbursing officer, as required by the VFRA Act. This requirement may be accomplished by increasing the Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on the relief association’s authorized disbursing officer to an amount greater than the expected maximum balance of the relief association’s cash assets, or by decreasing the relief association’s cash assets to an amount anticipated to remain below the policy coverage amount. In addition, relief association officials should monitor the relief association’s cash balance to ensure that unexpected events affecting the relief association’s current funds do not again result in insufficient Surety (Fidelity) bond coverage on the relief association’s authorized disbursing officer. 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 relief association increased their bond coverage to \$450,000 on May 7, 2024.

Auditor’s Conclusion: We reviewed documentation verifying that the bond coverage was increased to \$450,000. Compliance for sufficient bond coverage during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.

COCHRAN HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Cochran Hose Company Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Jed Von Hofen
President

Mr. Jan Von Hofen
Vice President

Mr. David Aloe
Secretary

Mr. Byron Harriger, III
Treasurer

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

Mr. John F. Schwend
Secretary
Edgeworth Borough

Ms. Mary E. Conlin
Secretary
Haysville Borough

Ms. Diane Vierling
Secretary
Glen Osborne Borough

Ms. Donna Kaib
Secretary
Sewickley Borough

COCHRAN HOSE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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