

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Bethlehem Township Volunteer Fire Company Relief Association Northampton County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024

June 2025



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Timothy Brady, President
Bethlehem Township Volunteer Fire
Company Relief Association
Northampton County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Bethlehem Township Volunteer Fire Company Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024. 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 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 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.

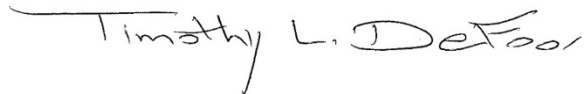
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024:

- The relief association took appropriate corrective action to address the findings 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.

We have issued the observation below as detailed in the Observation section of this report.

Observation – FDIC Coverage Limits Exceeded

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the relief association. We would like to thank the relief association officials for the cooperation extended to us during the conduct of the audit.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
June 12, 2025

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BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,¹ Section 403 of The Fiscal Code,² and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act ("VFRA Act"),³ 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, commonly referred to as Act 205,⁴ 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 municipality:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Bethlehem Township	Northampton	\$105,804	\$107,240	\$109,972

¹ Pa. Const. Art. VIII § 10.

² 72 P.S. § 403.

³ 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.*

⁴ 53 P.S. § 895.701 *et seq.*

BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association's records, its total cash and investments as of December 31, 2024, were \$544,977, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 311,911
Fair Value of Investments	<u>233,066</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u>\$ 544,977</u>

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024, were \$319,616, 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.⁵ **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	\$ 2,000
Relief benefits	<u>800</u>
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 2,800</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 214,106
Equipment maintenance	<u>2,646</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 216,752</u>
Administrative Services:	
Other administrative expenses	<u>\$ 64</u>
Total Investments Purchased	<u>\$ 100,000</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 319,616</u>

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:

Bethlehem Township Volunteer Fire Company, Inc.

⁵ Accuracy was evaluated for a selection of transactions based on dollar amount, category, and/or random selection.

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relief association has complied with the prior audit findings and recommendations, as follows:

- Failure To Monitor Financial Accounts

By receiving and depositing \$15,500 from the affiliated fire company for the sale of a rescue vehicle and monitoring all financial accounts.

- Inappropriate Ownership Of Rescue Vehicle

By ensuring the title of the rescue vehicle was transferred to the relief association.

- Inadequate Surety (Fidelity) Bond Coverage

By obtaining a bond policy solely in the relief association's name.

We commend the relief association management for its efforts in complying with the findings and recommendations contained in the prior audit report. The relief association management should strive to remain in compliance with all applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures.

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION OBSERVATION

Observation – FDIC Coverage Limits Exceeded

As disclosed in a written observation in the two previous audits, the relief association again failed to ensure that all cash deposits were below the FDIC coverage limits per account ownership in one institution. As of December 31, 2024, the relief association's ending cash and investment balances with the financial institution amounted to \$338,594.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) is an independent agency of the United States government that protects the funds depositors place in banks and savings associations. FDIC insurance is backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government.

FDIC insurance covers all deposit accounts, including:

- Checking accounts
- Savings accounts
- Money market accounts
- Certificates of deposit

FDIC insurance does not cover other financial products and services that banks may offer, such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds, life insurance policies, annuities and securities. The standard insurance amount is \$250,000 per depositor, per insured bank, for each account ownership category.

Section 7413 of the VFRA Act states that the purpose of this subchapter is to encourage individuals to take part in the fire service as volunteer firefighters by establishing criteria and standards for orderly administration and conduct of affairs of firefighters' relief associations to ensure as far as circumstances will reasonably permit, that the funds shall be available for the protection of the volunteer firefighters' and their heirs.

Furthermore, prudent business practice dictates that in addition to performing monthly bank reconciliations, the relief association should ensure the relief association's cash balance does not exceed FDIC limits set by banking regulations. Lack of effective monitoring of relief association cash and investment assets places the relief association funds at greater risk for loss.

The relief association should monitor all cash and investment assets that are eligible for FDIC insurance and ensure the balance of those assets per banking institution does not exceed FDIC coverage limits.

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Bethlehem Township Volunteer Fire Company Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Timothy Brady
President

Mr. Colby Kuronya
Secretary

Mr. Eric Norder
Treasurer

Mr. David Stapinski
Director

Mr. Dennis Higgins
Director

Mr. Michael Forstoffer
Director

Mr. Martin J. Comer
Director

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

Mr. Doug Bruce
Secretary
Bethlehem Township

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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.