

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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## Cranesville Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association

Erie County, Pennsylvania

For the Period

January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023

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April 2025



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Tim Crane, President  
Cranesville Volunteer Firemen's  
Relief Association  
Erie County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Cranesville Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2022, 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.

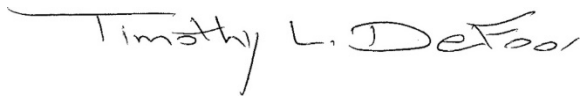
The objective of the audit was to determine if the relief association complied with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative procedures as they relate to the receipt of state aid and the expenditure of relief association funds. Our audit was limited to the areas related to the objective 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 objective. 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, 2023, 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 – Unauthorized Expenditures

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Timothy L. DeFoor  
Auditor General  
February 26, 2025

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## BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,<sup>1</sup> Section 403 of The Fiscal Code,<sup>2</sup> and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act ("VFRA Act"),<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Pa. Const. Art. VIII § 10.

<sup>2</sup> 72 P.S. § 403.

<sup>3</sup> 35 Pa.C.S. § 7411 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> 53 P.S. § 895.701 *et seq.*

**BACKGROUND – (Continued)**

The relief association was allocated state aid from the following municipalities:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
Albion Borough	Erie	*	\$ 7,101
Conneaut Township	Erie	\$12,228	\$17,685
Cranesville Borough	Erie	\$ 2,702	\$ 2,682
Elk Creek Township	Erie	\$10,883	\$10,708

\* During the current audit period, the relief association did not receive an allocation of state aid from Albion Borough in 2022. Municipalities have sole discretion to distribute their annual allocation of state aid received to any relief association providing fire service to the municipality.

Based on the relief association’s records, its total cash as of December 31, 2023, was \$98,850, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 98,850</u>
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## BACKGROUND – (Continued)

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023, were \$53,985, 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>5</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	<u>\$ 27,265</u>
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#### Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 18,260
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Training expenses	<u>7,948</u>
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Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 26,208</u>
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#### Administrative Services:

Bond premiums	<u>\$ 500</u>
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#### Other Expenditures:

Unauthorized expenditure – See Finding *	<u>\$ 12</u>
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Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 53,985</u></u>
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\* In addition, during the prior audit period, the relief association expended \$750 in unauthorized expenditures, which was cited previously as verbal observation during the prior audit period. Relief officials did not address the unauthorized expenditure prior to the end of the current audit period ending December 31, 2023. Refer to the Finding noted in this report for further information.

The volunteer firefighters’ relief association and the affiliated fire service organizations are separate, legal entities. The relief association is affiliated with the following fire service organizations:

Cranesville Volunteer Fire Department

Cranesville Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary

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

CRANESVILLE VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

**Finding – Unauthorized Expenditures**

Condition: As cited as a verbal observation during the prior audit period, the relief association expended \$750 in unauthorized expenditures for training that was not provided by the vendor to the relief association, and the relief association did not take corrective action to address the unauthorized expenditure prior to the end of the current audit period ending December 31, 2023. In addition, during the current audit period, the relief association expended \$12 for the payment of Pennsylvania sales tax that is not authorized by the VFRA Act.

Criteria: Section 7416(f) of the VFRA Act states:

The funds of any volunteer firefighters' relief association may be spent:

- (1) To pay for such normal and reasonable running expenses as may be appropriate to the businesslike conduct of the affairs of the association, including legal fees, rental or purchase of offices, payment of reasonable compensation of employees and purchase of office equipment and supplies.
- (10) To pay reasonable expenses actually and necessarily incurred for attending bona fide firefighters' training schools.
- (11) To purchase safeguards for preserving life, health and safety of volunteer firefighters to ensure their availability to participate in the volunteer fire service, including necessary training.

In addition, Section 7418(b) of the VFRA Act states:

- (b) Findings -- If the Auditor General finds that money received by a volunteer firefighters' relief association has been expended for a purpose other than one authorized by this subchapter, the commissioner, upon receiving notice of the finding from the auditor general, shall decline to approve payment to the volunteer firefighters' relief association until the improperly expended amount has been reimbursed to the relief association fund.

Costs associated with the payment for trainings not provided and for the payment of sales tax do not qualify as authorized volunteer firefighters' relief association expenditures; consequently, these disbursements are not authorized under the VFRA Act.

CRANESVILLE VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

**Finding – (Continued)**

Cause: The relief association officials stated that the training class in the prior audit period was cancelled due to COVID, and that the instructor would not reimburse the cost of the training class to the relief association. The relief association officials indicated that due to time constraints an individual, and not the relief association, made the original purchase on which the sales tax was paid.

Effect: As a result of these improper expenditures, relief association funds were not available for investment purposes, or to pay for expenditures authorized by the VFRA Act.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$762 (\$750 + \$12) for the unauthorized expenditures and that relief association officials become familiar with Section 7416(f) of the VFRA Act to aid them in determining the propriety of future expenditures. 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 affiliated fire company reimbursed the relief association \$762 for the unauthorized expenditures on December 6, 2024.

Auditor's Conclusion: We reviewed documentation verifying that the reimbursement of \$762 was received. Compliance for expenditures made during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.

CRANESVILLE 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

Cranesville Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association Governing Body:

**Mr. Tim Crane**  
President

**Ms. Laurie Vorse**  
Treasurer

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

**Mr. Gary L. Wells**  
Secretary  
Albion Borough

**Ms. Denise Fetterolf**  
Secretary  
Conneaut Township

**Ms. Theresa Pogson**  
Secretary  
Cranesville Borough

**Ms. Shirley Bilek**  
Secretary  
Elk Creek Township

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://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](mailto:news@PaAuditor.gov).