

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

The Firefighters Relief Association of Douglass Township Montgomery County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2023

October 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Steven Volpi, President
The Firefighters Relief Association of
Douglass Township
Montgomery County

We have conducted a compliance audit of The Firefighters Relief Association of Douglass Township (relief association) for the period January 1, 2020, 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 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.

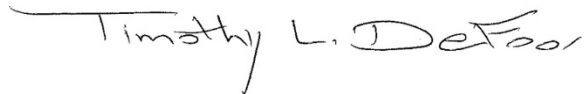
Relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the relief association's administration of state aid and accumulated relief association funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws, and administrative 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, 2020, to December 31, 2023:

- 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, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding – Failure To Deposit Proceeds From The Sale Of A Jointly Purchased Vehicle

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
September 25, 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 municipality:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
Douglass Township	Montgomery	\$67,123	\$60,344	\$75,517	\$77,538

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 \$235,459, as illustrated below:

Cash	\$ 67,417
Fair Value of Investments	<u>168,042</u>
Total Cash and Investments	<u>\$ 235,459</u>

Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2023, were \$524,298, 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>\$ 49,390</u>
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 237,914
Equipment maintenance	52,545
Training expenses	12,570
Fire prevention materials	<u>5,335</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 308,364</u>
Administrative Services:	
Bond premiums	\$ 1,284
Other administrative expenses *	<u>3,017</u>
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 4,301</u>
Total Investments Purchased	<u>\$ 162,243</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 524,298</u>

* A portion of the other administrative expenses represents \$2,257 for an alerting system subscription.

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:

Gilbertsville Fire & Rescue Company

THE FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF DOUGLASS TOWNSHIP
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:

- Unauthorized Expenditure

By receiving reimbursement of \$2,403 from the affiliated fire company for the unauthorized expenditure made in the prior audit period.

- Duplicate Payment

By receiving reimbursement of \$440 from the affiliated fire company for the duplicate payment.

- Inadequate Financial Record-Keeping System

By establishing and maintaining a financial record-keeping system that allows the membership to effectively monitor the relief association's financial operations.

THE FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF DOUGLASS TOWNSHIP
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – Failure To Deposit Proceeds From The Sale Of A Jointly Purchased Vehicle

Condition: During 1996 and 1997, the relief association expended \$128,703 towards the joint purchase of a 1996 Simon Duplex with the affiliated fire company which had a total cost of \$342,126. The relief association entered into an agreement with the affiliated fire company dated June 8, 2004, where the relief association would receive the pro-rata share percentage of 37.6% if the vehicle was ever sold. In 2020, the jointly purchased vehicle was sold for \$47,500; however, the relief association did not receive and deposit its proportional ownership interest of the proceeds from the sale of the jointly purchased vehicle.

Criteria: Section 7418(a) of the VFRA Act states:

The Office of Auditor General shall have the power and its duty shall be to audit the accounts and records of every volunteer firefighters' relief association receiving money under Chapter 7 of the Act of December 18, 1984 (P.L. 1005, No. 205), known as the Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard and Recovery Act, as far as may be necessary to satisfy the Auditor General that the money received was or is being expended for no purpose other than that authorized by this subchapter. Copies of all audits shall be furnished to the Governor.

Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association should secure its proportional ownership interest in the jointly purchased vehicle by executing a formal written agreement that enumerates the relief association's proportional share of financing. Such agreement shall specify that the relief association shall receive its prorated share of the proceeds upon sale of the vehicle, in the event the vehicle is ever sold. Once the vehicle is sold, the relief association officials should closely monitor all sales to ensure proceeds are received and timely deposited into a relief association account.

Cause: Relief association officials stated that it was an oversight and that the fire company was unaware that the relief association had 37% ownership in the vehicle.

Effect: The failure to receive and deposit the proceeds from the sale of a jointly purchased vehicle with the affiliated fire company places the relief association's ownership interest at greater risk. As a result, the relief association was unable to use the funds for general operating expenses or for investment purposes.

THE FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF DOUGLASS TOWNSHIP
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Finding – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$17,860 for its pro-rata share of the proceeds from the sale of the jointly purchased vehicle. We also recommend the relief association officials establish accounting and internal control procedures to ensure that all future proceeds resulting from the sale of a jointly purchased vehicle are timely deposited in a relief association account. 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 partially reimbursed the relief association \$17,575 on June 18, 2024, for its pro-rata share of the sale of the jointly purchased vehicle. The relief association is still due the remaining balance of \$285.

Auditor’s Conclusion: We reviewed documentation verifying that the partial reimbursement of \$17,575 was received. There is still a balance of \$285. Compliance for proceeds from the sale of a jointly purchased vehicle made during the next audit period will be subject to verification through our next audit.

THE FIREFIGHTERS RELIEF ASSOCIATION OF DOUGLASS TOWNSHIP
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The Firefighters Relief Association of Douglass Township Governing Body:

Mr. Steven Volpi
President

Mr. Vincente Ramirez
Vice President

Mr. Daniel McKenna
Secretary

Mr. Donald Bergstresser, Jr.
Treasurer

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

Ms. Marcy Meitzler
Secretary
Douglass Township

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.