### **COMPLIANCE AUDIT**

# Keystone Valley Firefighters' Relief Association

Chester County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2024

December 2025



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Robert Guiney, President Keystone Valley Firefighters' Relief Association Chester County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Keystone Valley Firefighters' Relief Association (relief association) for the period January 1, 2021, 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, 2021, to December 31, 2024:

- The relief association did not take appropriate corrective action to address the three findings contained in our prior audit report, as detailed below, and discussed in the Status of Prior Findings section of this report.
- Because of the significance of the matter described in Finding No. 2 below and discussed later in this report, the relief association did not, in all significant respects, comply 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, collectively as a whole. Therefore, the relief association may be subject to the potential withholding of its upcoming state aid distribution, as discussed in the Potential Withhold of State Aid section of this report.
  - Finding No. 1 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws
  - Finding No. 2 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation Failure To Obtain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number
  - Finding No. 3 Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation Failure
    To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Cumulative
    Equipment Roster And Failure To Conduct An Annual
    Physical Inventory Of Equipment
  - Finding No. 4 Failure To Disclose A Related Party Transaction
  - Finding No. 5 Unauthorized Expenditures

Three of the five audit findings contained in this report cite conditions that existed in the operation of the relief association during the prior audit period and were not corrected during the current audit period. We are concerned by the number of findings noted and strongly encourage timely implementation of the recommendations noted in this audit report.

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the relief association and, where appropriate, their responses have 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

Timothy L. Detool

November 7, 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.

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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 72 P.S. § 403.

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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> 53 P.S. § 895.701 et seq.

#### **BACKGROUND** – (Continued)

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

Municipality	County	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland Township	Chester	\$ 6,253	\$ 7,683	\$ 7,668	\$ 7,747*
Parkesburg Borough	Chester	\$16,250	\$20,768	\$20,742	\$21,037
West Sadsbury Township	Chester	\$16,018	\$19,643	\$19,712	\$20,026

<sup>\*</sup> Although Highland Township prepared and returned a Certification Form AG 385 for 2024, Highland Township failed to complete the 2024 Receipt And Distribution Of Foreign Fire Insurance Premium Tax Form 706-B online as required by the instructions accompanying Form 706-B and the instructions accompanying the 2024 state aid allocation received by Highland Township.

Highland Township is required to complete a 2024 Receipt And Distribution Of Foreign Fire Insurance Premium Tax Form 706-B online within the Department of Community & Economic Development's Municipal Statistics website (MunStats) immediately.

Based on the relief association's records, its total cash as of December 31, 2024, was \$60,022, as illustrated below:

Cash \$ 60,022

#### **BACKGROUND – (Continued)**

Based on the relief association's records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2024, were \$201,713, 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. 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	\$	48,052
Fire Services:		
Equipment purchased	\$	50,169
Equipment maintenance		68,309
Training expenses		27,080
Total Fire Services	\$	145,558
Administrative Services:		
Bond premiums	\$	900
Other administrative expenses		111
Total Administrative Services	\$	1,011
Other Expenditures:		
Payments on loan	\$	6,667
Unauthorized expenditures – See Finding No. 5	·	425
Total Other Expenditures	\$	7,092
Total Expenditures	\$	201,713

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:

Keystone Valley Fire Department

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

### KEYSTONE VALLEY FIRE RELIEF ASSOCIATION STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

#### NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relief association has not complied with the following prior audit findings. These findings are noted below and discussed in detail in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report:

- Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws
- Failure To Obtain A Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number
- Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Cumulative Equipment Roster And Failure To Conduct An Annual Physical Inventory Of Equipment

We are concerned by the relief association's failure to correct those previously reported audit findings. The relief association management should strive to implement the recommendations and corrective actions noted in this audit report.

### <u>Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The existing bylaws of the relief association do not contain all the provisions required by Section 7415(c) of the VFRA Act. Specifically, the bylaws do not address the procedures for the election of the board of directors.

A similar condition was noted in the three prior audit reports.

<u>Criteria</u>: The relief association's bylaws did not contain the following provision as defined in Section 7415(c) of the VFRA Act:

(5) State the procedure to be followed in nominating and in electing officers, trustees, directors, and members of the executive committee, according to the provisions which have been made for establishment of those positions.

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that they were unaware of the mandatory bylaw provision established by the VFRA Act despite the relief association being notified of this condition during prior audits.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the mandatory provisions not being included in the bylaws, the relief association may not have conducted its affairs in accordance with the VFRA Act.

<u>Recommendation</u>: We again recommend that the relief association officials review and update the bylaws governing the organization to meet the requirements set forth in the VFRA Act. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated that they will update the bylaws to include the provision for the election of the board of directors.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: 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.

### <u>Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Obtain A</u> <u>Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number</u>

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association failed to obtain a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number. The relief association relies on the use of another entity's sales tax exemption number.

A similar condition was noted in the two prior audit reports.

<u>Criteria</u>: The following Pennsylvania law indicates that the relief association is a charitable corporation with the ability to obtain its own Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number issued by the Department of Revenue; to exempt from tax, the purchases made on behalf of the agency's charitable purposes. Additionally, misuse of an exemption number, such as using another entity's sales tax exemption number, can lead to charges, imprisonment, fines, and/or costs.

Section 7415(e) of the VFRA Act states:

A volunteer firefighters' relief association organized or conducted in accordance with the requirements of this section shall be regarded as a charitable corporation for all purposes, including the right to establish exemption from the operation of certain taxes.

The Pennsylvania Administrative Code states, in part, at Section 32.21:

Charitable, volunteer firemen's and religious organizations, and nonprofit educational institutions

- (b) *Procedures for claiming exemption*. Use of the exemption shall conform with the following:
  - (1) *Identity of purchaser or user*. The person claiming the exemption shall be an authorized agent or representative of the exempt organization, which is entitled to the exemption, and shall make the purchase in the name of and from funds of the exempt organization.

#### Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

- (2) Exemption numbers. An organization desiring to qualify as an exempt organization shall file with the Department [of Revenue] a completed Application for Sales Tax Exempt Status form, together with related documentation and other information required by the Department. The Department will not consider the application unless the organization is actively performing the activities upon which it bases its claim for exemption. The Department will review the application and documents, and if in its opinion the activities of the organization qualify it as an exempt organization, will issue an exemption number, prefixed by the number "75," to the organization. The Department may issue an exemption number to the parent organization for use by member organizations. Only organizations which are registered with the Department and hold an exemption number are permitted to make tax free purchases for use by the organization. (Emphasis added.)
- (4) Exemption certificates. A purchase by an exempt organization shall be supported by a valid, properly executed Sales and Use Tax Exemption Certificate which is to be retained by the vendor.

The Pennsylvania Administrative Code states, in part, Section 32.2:

#### **Exemption certificates**

(c) **Penalties for misuse of exemption certificates.** False or fraudulent statements made upon an exemption certificate by a person, whether a seller, lessor, buyer, lessee or a representative or agent of the persons, is a misdemeanor, upon each separate conviction of which the offender may be sentenced to imprisonment not exceeding 1 year, a fine not exceeding \$1,000, or both, together with costs of prosecution. In addition, severe civil penalties are provided by law for misuse of exemption certificates by any person. Reference should be made to section 268(b) of the TRC (72 P. S. § 7268(b)). (Emphasis added.)

Further, the use of a Pennsylvania Tax Exemption Certificate (also referred to as a REV-1220), requires the user of the certificate to attest by signing the certificate that the user has the legal authority to utilize the certificate, and misuse could result in a fine and imprisonment.

#### Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

<u>Cause</u>: Relief association officials indicated that the failure to obtain a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number was an oversight. Despite the relief association being notified of this condition during prior audits, the relief association continues to rely on the use of another entity's sales tax exemption number.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of the relief association's continued failure to obtain its own active/valid sales tax exemption number and use of another entity's tax exemption number during the current audit period, certain purchases are considered to be unauthorized expenditures. Additionally, the relief association may be required to pay Pennsylvania sales tax on these purchases since it is likely that the relief association is in violation of the Pennsylvania Sales and Use Tax Law. Misuse of an issued exemption number, such as using another entity's sales tax exemption number, may result in the imposition of charges, imprisonment, fines up to \$1,000, and costs of prosecution. Furthermore, the relief association's future state aid allocations may be withheld until the relief association complies with the finding recommendation.

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials immediately discontinue use of another entity's sales tax exemption number. We further recommend that the relief association apply for a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue and furnish an exemption certificate with its own sales tax exemption number to all vendors from whom the relief association purchases equipment and/or services. Failure to take action to comply with the recommendation may result in the withholding of future state aid funds. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will apply for apply for a Pennsylvania sales tax exemption number.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: Due to the potential withhold of state aid, the relief association's compliance with the finding recommendation will be monitored subsequent to the release of the audit report and through the next audit of the relief association.

## Finding No. 3 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Cumulative Equipment Roster And Failure To Conduct An Annual Physical Inventory Of Equipment

<u>Condition</u>: The relief association failed to maintain a complete and accurate cumulative roster of equipment owned by the relief association. Although a listing of relief association owned equipment was provided during the current audit, the roster was incomplete because it did not contain the names of suppliers (vendors), dates of purchase, and cost of equipment, and serial numbers necessary to accurately identify equipment owned by the relief association. In addition, the roster provided was comingled with the equipment owned by the affiliated fire company. Furthermore, there was no evidence that a physical inventory of equipment was conducted on an annual basis to account for the equipment owned by the relief association.

A similar condition was noted in the prior audit report.

<u>Criteria</u>: Prudent business practice dictates that the relief association establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure the maintenance of a complete and accurate cumulative roster of equipment purchased by the relief association and that the performance of an annual physical inventory of all equipment is documented. A complete and accurate cumulative equipment roster of all relief association purchased equipment should include the following:

- Types of equipment purchased
- Dates of purchase
- Unit costs
- Names of suppliers from which the equipment was purchased
- Serial numbers, if applicable
- Current location(s) of items
- Final dispositions if damaged, sold or disposed of
- Evidence of the performance, date, and results of an annual physical inventory

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials did not provide a reason why this occurred despite the relief association being notified of these conditions during the prior audit.

<u>Effect</u>: Continued failure to properly record equipment purchases in a complete and accurate cumulative equipment roster prevents relief association officials from effectively monitoring the relief association's equipment purchases. In addition, failure to maintain a complete and accurate cumulative equipment roster and failure to perform an annual physical inventory of the equipment prevents adequate accountability for, and safeguarding of, relief association assets.

#### Finding No. 3 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials maintain a complete and accurate cumulative equipment roster of all relief association equipment, separate and apart from the affiliated fire company's equipment. Furthermore, the relief association should ensure an annual physical inventory of all relief association purchased equipment is performed and documented. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will purchase new equipment management software.

<u>Auditor's Conclusion</u>: 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.

#### Finding No. 4 – Failure To Disclose A Related Party Transaction

Condition: Related party transaction occurs when the relief association does business with a vendor that employs a relief association member or is owned by a relief association officer or a member of an officer's immediate family, or when the relief association conducts business directly with a relief association member. Such transactions may provide a less than arm's length financial benefit to the member, officer, or the officer's immediate family member through a commission or a profit from a sale. During the current audit period, relief association officials failed to disclose a related party transaction to the membership. Specifically, the relief association sold a 2007 Ford Expedition to a relief association member for \$500. The transaction was not documented in the meeting minutes, and supporting evidence of the vehicle's fair value at the time of sale was not provided for audit.

<u>Criteria</u>: Prudent business practices dictate that all potential related party transactions be disclosed to the membership and recorded in the minutes of relief association meetings. In addition, all members and/or officers involved with a business that is party to the related party transaction should abstain from all voting on matters involving such transactions.

Prudent business practice also dictates that the fair value of vehicles be determined prior to sale.

Cause: The relief association officials did not provide a reason why these matters occurred.

#### Finding No. 4 – (Continued)

<u>Effect</u>: Failure to properly disclose a related party transaction may create potential conflicts of interest which could result in the relief association being involved in less than arm's length financial transactions. In addition, failure to determine the fair value of a vehicle prior to its sale limits the relief association's ability to ensure that full value was received and prevents the use of such potential funds for general operating expenses or for investment purposes.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association officials take the actions necessary to eliminate the appearance of conflicts of interests. Actions should include, but are not limited to, written notification to the relief association membership of each related party transaction, and the abstention of the related party from decisions and voting on matters involving the related party transactions. These actions should be documented in the relief association's minutes of meetings. In addition, the relief association officials should closely review all related party transactions to ensure that the transactions are conducted as an arm's length transaction, i.e., the cost of the services rendered by the firm is competitive. Furthermore, we recommend that the relief association determine the fair value of vehicles prior to sale and ensure full value is received.

<u>Management's Response</u>: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will disclose related party transaction information in its meeting minutes. The relief association did not provide a response regarding the determination of the fair value of vehicles prior to sale.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification during the next audit.

#### <u>Finding No. 5 – Unauthorized Expenditures</u>

<u>Condition</u>: During the current audit period, the relief association incurred the following expenditures that are not authorized under the VFRA Act.

Date	Check No.	Description	Amount		
11/28/2021	536	Training for career staff		\$	65
12/03/2021	537	Training for career staff			35
01/02/2023	575	Training for career staff			325
			Total	\$	425

#### Finding No. 5 – (Continued)

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.
- (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 training career staff do not qualify as authorized volunteer firefighters' relief association expenditures; consequently, these disbursements are not authorized under the VFRA Act.

<u>Cause</u>: The relief association officials indicated that career staff signed the wrong training roster, therefore, the relief association was invoiced for their training.

<u>Effect</u>: As a result of these unauthorized expenditures, relief association funds were not available for investment purposes, or to pay for expenditures authorized by the VFRA Act. In addition, because of stipulations within the VFRA Act, failure to obtain reimbursement of the unauthorized expenditure may result in a withholding of future state aid allocations until the monies related to the unauthorized expenditures identified in the finding have been reimbursed to the relief association.

#### Finding No. 5 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$425 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. All supporting documentation verifying the receipt of reimbursement for unauthorized expenditures should be submitted by the relief association to: Department of the Auditor General, Bureau of Fire Relief Audits, Room 316-E Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

<u>Management's Response</u>: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will seek reimbursement from the affiliated fire company.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification during the next audit.

### KEYSTONE VALLEY FIRE RELIEF ASSOCIATION POTENTIAL WITHHOLD OF STATE AID

A condition of a repeat finding such as that reported by Finding No. 2 contained in this audit report may lead to a total withholding of state aid in the future unless that finding is corrected. However, such action may not be considered if sufficient documentation is provided within 60 days to verify compliance with this department's recommendations. Such documentation should be submitted by the relief association to: Department of the Auditor General, Bureau of Fire Relief Audits, Room 316E Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120.

### KEYSTONE VALLEY FIRE RELIEF ASSOCIATION REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

#### The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro

Governor Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Keystone Valley Firefighters' Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Robert Guiney

Board of Directors, Chairman

**Ms. Michelle Kreger**Board of Directors, Co-Chairman

Mr. Richard Daisley
Secretary

Mr. Stanley Przchodzien
Treasurer

**Austin Van Der Mooren** Board of Directors - Member

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

Ms. Barbara Davis
Secretary

Highland Township

Ms. Wanda Harner

Secretary Parkesburg Borough

Ms. Chelsy Oswald

Secretary West Sadsbury Township

### KEYSTONE VALLEY FIRE RELIEF ASSOCIATION REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

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