

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Media Fire & Hook & Ladder Co. No. 1 Relief Association Delaware County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2023

November 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Chris Zuccarelli, President
Media Fire & Hook & Ladder Co. No. 1
Relief Association
Delaware County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Media Fire & Hook & Ladder Co. No. 1 Relief Association (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.

We were not able to obtain independent confirmations of the cash balance from the financial institutions. Therefore, while the relief association provided bank statements that indicated that, as of December 31, 2023, the relief association had a cash balance of \$231,734, we were not able to verify this cash balance.

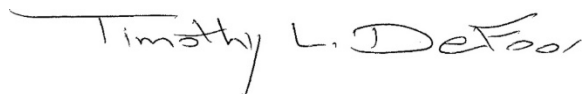
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, except for the effects, if any, of the matter described in the preceding paragraph, for the period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2023:

- The relief association took appropriate corrective action to address two of the three findings contained in our prior audit report. However, the relief association failed to take appropriate corrective action to address the one remaining finding contained in our prior audit report, as listed below, and discussed in the Status of Prior Findings section of this 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 findings listed below and discussed later in this report.

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –
Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of
Funds

Finding No. 2 – Unauthorized Expenditures

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
November 13, 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>
Media Borough	Delaware	\$42,329	\$40,898	\$52,046	\$53,478

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 as of December 31, 2023, was \$231,734, as illustrated below:

Cash	<u>\$ 231,734</u>
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Based on the relief association’s records, its total expenditures for the period January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2023, were \$204,164, 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	\$ 67,482
Relief benefits	<u>16,505</u>
Total Benefit Services	<u>\$ 83,987</u>

Fire Services:

Equipment purchased	\$ 21,519
Equipment maintenance	64,063
Training expenses	<u>20,481</u>
Total Fire Services	<u>\$ 106,063</u>

Administrative Services:

Bond premiums	\$ 836
Other administrative expenses *	<u>11,049</u>
Total Administrative Services	<u>\$ 11,885</u>

Other Expenditures:

Unauthorized expenditures – See Finding No. 2	<u>\$ 2,229</u>
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Total Expenditures	<u><u>\$ 204,164</u></u>
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* A majority of the other administrative expenses represent \$10,308 expended throughout the audit period for accounting services.

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:

Media Fire & Hook & Ladder Co. No.1

MEDIA FIRE & HOOK & LADDER CO. NO. 1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Untimely Deposit Of State Aid

By timely depositing all income received.

- Failure To Maintain A Complete And Accurate Equipment Roster

By maintaining a cumulative inventory roster of all relief association owned equipment.

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

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

- Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

We are concerned by the relief association's failure to correct this previously reported audit finding. The relief association management should strive to implement the recommendation and corrective action noted in this audit report.

MEDIA FIRE & HOOK & LADDER CO. NO. 1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Signatory Authority For The Disbursement Of Funds

Condition: During the current audit engagement, we identified 140 checks out of 140 checks drawn on the relief association’s checking account that only contained the signature of one officer (the Relief Association Treasurer), even though two signatures are required by the VFRA Act and the relief association’s bylaws. Issuing checks with the signature of only one relief association officer negates the relief association’s internal control over the disbursement process.

A similar condition was noted in our prior audit report.

Criteria: Section 7415(c)(3) of the VFRA Act states, in part:

The bylaws shall require that the signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the disbursing officer, shall be required to bind the association by formal contract or to issue a negotiable instrument.

In addition, the relief association’s bylaws at Article 7, Section 1 states:

The bylaws shall require that the signatures of at least two officers, one of whom shall be the Treasurer, shall be required for the issuance of Relief Association checks, withdrawal from the association savings account, the redemption of any Relief Association investment or any other negotiable instrument issued by the association.

Furthermore, prudent business practice dictates that the relief association has sufficient internal control procedures in place to ensure the signatures of at least two relief association officials are included on all negotiable instruments. Adequate internal control procedures require that checks be signed only after the propriety of the expenditure has been determined and the payee, date, and amount to be paid has been confirmed. Additionally, responsible relief association officers should compare this information with supporting documentation, such as invoices, contracts, etc., prior to approving the checks.

Cause: The relief association officials stated it was difficult getting other relief association officers to the bank to sign the signatory card.

Effect: As a result of the relief association officer issuing checks with only one authorized signature, assets were placed at greater risk as expenditures were being made without a second relief association officer having the opportunity to verify the propriety of the expenditures. The application of the second authorized signature, after evaluating the propriety of the expenditure, reduces the risk of misappropriation and the risk of errors occurring and going undetected.

MEDIA FIRE & HOOK & LADDER CO. NO. 1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We again recommend that the relief association officials establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure that the signatures of at least two authorized relief association officers, one of whom shall be the Treasurer, are included on all relief association negotiable instruments as defined by the VFRA Act and the relief association’s bylaws. 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 indicated they will take action to comply with the recommendation.

Auditor’s Conclusion: 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. 2 – Unauthorized Expenditures

Condition: The relief association expended funds for the following items during the current audit period that are not authorized by the VFRA Act:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Check No.</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
04/06/2022	2453	Physical for non-member	\$ 345
05/12/2023	2532	Maintenance of fire company equipment	335
11/07/2023	2556	Maintenance of fire company equipment	1,549
Total			<u>\$ 2,229</u>

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.

MEDIA FIRE & HOOK & LADDER CO. NO. 1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

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 physicals for non-members, and maintenance of equipment owned by the affiliated fire company, do not qualify as authorized volunteer firefighters' relief association expenditures; consequently, this disbursement is not authorized under the VFRA Act.

Cause: The relief association officials indicated this was a one-time mistake.

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. In addition, because of stipulations within the VFRA Act, failure to obtain reimbursement of the improperly expended funds will result in a withholding of future state aid fund disbursements until the improperly expended fire relief association monies identified in the finding have been reimbursed to the relief association.

Recommendation: We recommend that the relief association be reimbursed \$2,229 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 the unauthorized expenditure 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.

Management's Response: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will take action to comply with the recommendation.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be subject to verification through our next audit.

MEDIA FIRE & HOOK & LADDER CO. NO. 1 RELIEF ASSOCIATION
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Media Fire & Hook & Ladder Co. No. 1 Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. Chris Zuccarelli
President

Mr. Edward Gibson, III
Vice President

Ms. Sharon Gibson
Secretary

Mr. James Kilpatrick
Treasurer

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

Ms. Brittany Forman
Secretary
Media Borough

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.