



Pension Division Newsletter

October 2023

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State Auditor's Working Group

The Fire Relief Association Working Group convened by the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) met on October 4 and finalized its legislative proposals for 2024. In addition to some technical clarifications, the proposals would:

- Clarify the period of time over which investment returns must be allocated to deferred member accounts for relief associations with a defined contribution plan;
- Clarify the benefit calculation and reporting requirements that apply when a relief association is involuntarily dissolved;
- Add definitions to the relief association statutes of "volunteer," "paid on-call," "part-time," and "full-time/career" firefighter;
- Update firefighter and relief association references to reflect the new definitions;
- Clarify when municipal ratification of a benefit level or bylaw change is required; and
- Clarify eligibility for supplemental benefits when a relief association dissolves.

We'll keep you updated on the progress of these proposals through our [monthly Newsletter](#) and the OSA's [Weekly Update](#). Meeting agendas and information, and meeting recordings, are available on the Working Group page of the [OSA website](#).

State Aid and Reporting Reminder

A listing from the Department of Revenue of the 2023 fire state aid and supplemental state aid amounts can be found on the [OSA website](#).

Please remember that Minnesota law requires forfeiture of fire state aid for relief associations that do not submit all required reporting information to the OSA by November 30, 2023. If 2022 reporting forms are not received by November 30, 2023, a relief association's 2023 state aid will be forfeited. The OSA does not have authority to grant filing extensions past the November 30 deadline.

If you have questions about your relief association's reporting requirements or submitting reporting forms, please contact Pension Division staff for assistance.

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What’s Ahead:

November 1:

Second certification deadline for 2023 fire state aid.

November 15:

Fire state aid is paid for those relief associations certified as eligible on the second certification deadline.

November 30:

Final deadline for submitting 2022 reporting-year forms to avoid forfeiture of fire state aid.

Keeping SAFES Login Information Secure

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month, and we wanted to take this opportunity to share a reminder about the importance of keeping your SAFES login information secure.

[SAFES](#) is the State Auditor’s Form Entry System, which is the secure web application used to access, submit, and electronically sign reporting forms. Because relief association reporting forms posted in SAFES contain member data classified as nonpublic under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, relief associations must take steps to protect this data. Here are steps all relief association trustees should take:

- Store your SAFES login information in a secure location. Never share it.
- When new officers are elected, the relief association should contact Pension Division staff to obtain a new SAFES account for the new officer.
- Make sure that the email account used to receive the SAFES password and other account confirmations is only accessible by the individual associated with the account. Do not use shared relief association email accounts.

In addition to these steps, relief associations should consider using a password manager, which is a secure tool for storing, organizing, and protecting passwords. There are many low and no-cost password managers available for download. A simple search for “password managers” will provide internet articles that provide reviews and recommendations. Be sure to conduct your own due diligence to choose a password manager best suited for your relief association’s needs.

2024 User Authorization Form

Access to reporting forms for accountants, auditors, and other consultants who work with relief associations will expire at the end of the calendar year. Access occurs primarily through the State Auditor’s Form Entry System (SAFES), but also extends to other offline relief association documents.

Relief associations will need to renew access for their accountants, auditors, and consultants by completing the 2024 User Authorization Form that is now available for download on the [OSA website](#).

The completed form can be submitted by [email](#), by fax to (651) 282-5298, or by mail to: 525 Park Street, Suite 500, Saint Paul, MN 55103.

A completed 2024 User Authorization Form provides access to relief association reporting information through December 31, 2024.

Deposit of Municipal Funds

Statements of Position:

[Fundraisers and Donations](#)

[Checking Accounts for Fire Departments and Relief Associations](#)

[Special and General Funds, and Charitable Gambling Funds](#)

[Maintaining a General Fund after Joining the PERA Statewide Plan](#)

Below are two compliance issues the OSA has seen related to municipal funds being deposited into the affiliated relief association’s general fund, and suggestions on how to avoid them.

Reimbursements for Fire Department Expenses

Minnesota law is clear that all money a relief association receives from a city or town must be deposited into the relief association’s special fund. A relief association cannot deposit money from a city or town into the relief association’s general fund, even if the money was intended to reimburse the general fund for municipal fire department expenses paid by the relief association.

For example, some relief associations use their general fund to purchase equipment for the fire department or pay for firefighter training. If a relief association chooses to use its general fund to cover expenses that would otherwise be the city’s or town’s obligation, it must absorb those expenses as the city or town cannot reimburse the relief association’s general fund. Alternatively, the city or town can pay the expenses directly, or the firefighters themselves could pay the expenses and be reimbursed by the city or town.

Deposit of Funds Intended for the Fire Department

All funds intended for use by a municipal fire department must be controlled by the city or town. Donations made to a municipal fire department are city or town funds, which can only be expended as permitted by law. To accept such a donation, a city council or town board must pass a resolution by a two-thirds majority. Funds intended for the fire department should not be deposited into a relief association’s general fund.

See our Statements of Position for additional information on [fire department funds](#) and on [fundraisers and donations](#).

Pension Division Staff

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