

DOCUMENT RESUME

02304 - [A1592575]

[Temporary Quarters with Relatives: Reasonableness of Amount].  
B-187419. June 1, 1977. 3 pp.

Decision re: Carl E. Williams; by Robert F. Keller, Deputy  
Comptroller General.

Issue Area: Personnel Management and Compensation: Compensation  
(305).

Contact: Office of the General Counsel: Civilian Personnel.

Budget Function: General Government: Central Personnel  
Management (805).

Organization Concerned: Marine Corps.

Authority: 52 Comp. Gen. 78. 55 Comp. Gen. 1107. 55 Comp. Gen.  
1110. F.T.R. (FPMR 101-7), para. 2-5.4a.

An Authorized Certifying Officer, United States Marine Corps, requested a decision anent the reasonableness of the amounts claimed for subsistence expenses by a transferred employee while occupying temporary quarters with a relative. GAO agreed with agency that \$26 a day for family's lodging and breakfasts paid to the relative and amounts for all other meals in restaurants were unreasonable. Employee must further substantiate claim. Otherwise, voucher may be certified only in amount determined by the agency to be reasonable. (Author/DJM)

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**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548

*Carter  
Civ. Per.*

FILE: B-187419

DATE: June 1, 1977

MATTER OF: Carl E. Williams - Temporary quarters with  
relatives - reasonableness of amount

DIGEST: Certifying officer questions reasonableness of claim for \$26 per day paid to employee's mother-in-law for lodging and breakfasts for wife and three children and also questions amount paid for all other meals in commercial establishments. Agency is responsible for determination of reasonableness in first instance. Employee should be required to provide evidence to substantiate amounts claimed based on criteria of 52 Comp. Gen. 78 (1972) and 55 id. 1107 (1976). Absent such evidence, voucher may be certified only in amount determined to be reasonable by agency.

A certifying officer of the United States Marine Corps has requested an advance decision by this Office regarding the claim of Carl E. Williams for temporary quarters subsistence expenses incident to a transfer. The certifying officer questions the reasonableness of amounts claimed by Mr. Williams while occupying temporary quarters in a residence owned by a relative.

The record shows that incident to a transfer to Albany, Georgia, Mr. Williams' family occupied temporary quarters in his mother-in-law's home in Moultrie, Georgia, from September 7, 1975, through and including October 6, 1975. Mr. Williams paid his mother-in-law \$20 per day for lodgings and \$6 per day for breakfasts for his wife and three daughters. Mr. Williams' itemization of expenses states that all lunches and dinners were eaten in commercial establishments, with lunches ranging from a low of \$8.60 to a high of \$12.40 per day and dinners from a low of \$11.20 to a high of \$16.40 per day. Laundry costs aggregated \$59. The certifying officer questions the reasonableness of the amounts claimed because the two older children were in school and "probably had lunch there." The certifying officer also questions the \$20 per day paid for lodgings and considers it unlikely that all noon and evening meals were eaten in restaurants. Mrs. Williams' mother has furnished an estimate of the additional utility costs and the value of her services, wear and tear, etc., incurred incident to the furnishing of temporary quarters which is considerably less than the amount claimed by Mr. Williams. The

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record shows that Mr. Williams was advised that suitable commercial lodgings would have cost \$36.05 per day.

The reimbursement to employees of the expenses of subsistence while occupying temporary quarters is governed by the provisions of chapter 2, part 5, of the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), FPMR 101-7 (May 1973). These regulations authorize reimbursement only for the actual subsistence expenses incurred provided they are incident to the occupancy of temporary quarters and are reasonable as to amount. FTR para. 2-5.4a. It is the responsibility of the employing agency, in the first instance, to determine that such expenses are reasonable in light of the circumstances of each individual case. Matter of Jesse A. Burks, 55 Comp. Gen. 1107, 1110 (1976).

We have on previous occasions suggested standards by which the reasonableness of amounts claimed might be measured. In Burks we weighed the amount claimed by an employee for subsistence against statistics prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor, regarding average annual family budgets by locale, which we adjusted for differences in income and individual circumstances such as income, family composition, etc. We stated there that the allowance should be based on the adjusted average budget in the absence of additional evidence that a higher amount should be used. In Matter of Lyle S. Miller, et al., 52 Comp. Gen. 78 (1972), we considered the question of the reasonableness of amounts claimed for subsistence by an employee whose dependents resided with relatives (first case) and an employee who obtained quarters and subsistence in a relative's home under a formal lease agreement (second case). We stated in this decision that employees who claim temporary quarters allowances for lodging with relatives should be required to substantiate the basis upon which lodging rates were determined and that it does not seem reasonable or necessary to us for employees to agree to pay relatives the same amounts they would have to pay for lodging in motels or meals in restaurants. We reiterate, however, that each case must be considered in view of its particular circumstances.

We concur with the view of the certifying officer that on the present record the amounts claimed by Mr. Williams for temporary quarters are unreasonable. We note particularly that the amount claimed for lodging bears little or no relationship to the additional costs incurred by Mrs. Williams' mother over this period

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and, in view of the assertion that Mr. Williams' two eldest children were in school, we also question the amounts claimed for lunches.

In these circumstances we are of the opinion that Mr. Williams should be required to provide additional substantiation for the amounts claimed for lodgings and subsistence. In the absence of such evidence, the voucher may be certified for payment only in the amount determined by the agency to be reasonable under the above suggested criteria.

Action on the voucher should be taken in accordance with the foregoing.

*A. J. K. H.*  
Deputy Comptroller General  
of the United States