

DECISION

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

FILE: B-218819

DATE: October 30, 1985

MATTER OF: John P. Butt - Dependent Relocation Travel

DIGEST:

A transferred employee secured a one-way airfare ticket for his dependent daughter to travel from her college location to his new permanent duty station to effect her change of station. He exchanged that ticket for a roundtrip excursion airfare ticket for her at a lesser cost than the initial one-way ticket, thus, permitting her to return to college at no additional expense. Since the record shows that no one-way airfare ticket between the two points could be issued at a cost less than the roundtrip excursion airfare ticket the expense claimed may be paid in its entirety under authority of the Federal Travel Regulations pertaining to indirect travel, which limits reimbursement to the constructive cost by the usually traveled route.

This decision is in response to a request from an Authorized Certifying Officer, National Finance Center, United States Department of Agriculture. It concerns the entitlement of one of its employees to be reimbursed the expenses of his dependent's travel incident to a permanent change-of-station transfer in October 1984. We conclude that the employee may be reimbursed for the following reasons.

BACKGROUND

The claimant, Mr. John P. Butt, an employee of the Forest Service, was stationed in Warren, Pennsylvania. By Travel Authorization, dated July 20, 1984, he was transferred to Ogden, Utah, effective October 28, 1984. Such transfer included travel and transportation rights of his immediate family, who were identified in the authorization as his spouse and 20 year old daughter, who at that time was a student at Pennsylvania State University.

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Pursuant to that authorization, an airfare ticket was issued for Mr. Butt's daughter on August 22, 1984, to travel one-way from State College, Pennsylvania, to Salt Lake City, Utah, on December 20, 1984, to effect her change of station. The cost of that one-way ticket was \$463. On August 23, 1984, the one-way ticket was exchanged by Mr. Butt for a roundtrip excursion airfare ticket, thus, permitting his daughter to travel from State College, Pennsylvania, to Salt Lake City, Utah, on December 20, 1984, and return to State College, Pennsylvania, on January 13, 1985. The cost of the roundtrip excursion ticket was \$461.

The certifying officer points out that since the Federal Travel Regulations only authorize a one-way relocation trip, the payment of the full amount of the round trip ticket is in doubt.

DECISION

The laws governing reimbursement for employee expenses incident to a transfer of official duty station are contained in 5 U.S.C. §§ 5724 and 5724a (1982). Among the various expenses authorized are the costs of transporting an employee's immediate family to his new duty station.

Part 2 of Chapter 2, Federal Travel Regulations, (FTR), incorp. by ref., 41 C.F.R. § 101-7.003 (1984), provides the rules governing basic entitlement to per diem, travel and transportation allowances for employees performing permanent change-of-station transfers. More specifically, FTR para. 2-2.2a provides that travel of the immediate family may begin at the employee's old official station or some other point selected by the employee. However, the cost to the Government for transportation of the immediate family cannot exceed the allowable cost by the usually traveled route between the employee's old and new official stations.

Further, FTR para. 1-2.5b provides in part:

"b. Indirect-route or interrupted travel.
When a person for his/her own convenience travels by an indirect route or interrupts travel by direct route, the extra expense shall be borne by him/her. Reimbursement

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for expenses shall be based only on such charges as would have been incurred by a usually traveled route. * * *

We have consistently applied the above rule, that absent official justification for the need for circuitous travel, when an employee travels by an indirect route, he is entitled to reimbursement for such travel, but not to exceed the cost by the usually traveled route. B-178535, June 21, 1973; John F. Brady, B-182927, July 2, 1975. We also stated in B-178535, above, that when personal and official travel is combined, we would not require cost proration of any transportation savings that may accrue which result solely from the fact that the employee performed some personal travel in addition to the required official travel.

In order to preclude the possibility that the expense associated with the issuance of the initial ticket was in error, we sought additional information to confirm the correctness of the charges made. We have been advised that the charge for the one-way airfare ticket as issued was correct; that the charge for the excursion airfare ticket was correct; and that no one-way airfare ticket for travel between the two points was issuable at a cost less than the roundtrip excursion airfare ticket actually issued.

We realize that there is no authority to reimburse the employee for his dependent's return travel, and in effect the travel was not indirect. Compare Willenburg and Ham, B-211775, October 5, 1983. However, in the present case, the fact that the special fare package included a return trip by which the dependent was able to return to college, does not negate the employee's reimbursement right for dependent relocation travel. The fact remains that the dependent did travel to the employee's new permanent duty station and residence, and at a lesser cost than it would otherwise have been on a one-way airfare ticket. The record also indicates, as stated above, that at the time the ticket was purchased, it was lowest fare available. See Marlene Boberick, B-210374, July 8, 1983. Thus, we believe that under the circumstances of this case, the

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rules following indirect travel should be followed, and reimbursement limited to the lower or constructive cost.

Accordingly, Mr. Butt may be reimbursed for the full fare paid.

for *Milton J. Butler*
Comptroller General
of the United States