



Comptroller General
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

146431

Decision

Matter of: Robin J. Foulk

File: B-246639

Date: April 15, 1992

DIGEST

Employee who was permanently transferred from Columbus to Crawford, Nebraska seeks reimbursement for two househunting trips. The claim is denied since an employee may be reimbursed travel and transportation expenses for only one round trip of an employee and spouse between the localities of the old and new duty stations for the purpose of seeking residence quarters. 5 U.S.C. § 5724a(a)(2) (1988). The fact that the employee had to abort one househunting trip after only one day because of severe flood conditions does not create a right to additional reimbursement where the expenses claimed are precluded by law.

DECISION

The issue in this case is whether Ms. Robin J. Foulk, an employee of the Soil Conservation Service, Department of Agriculture, may be reimbursed for expenses she incurred for two househunting trips to seek permanent residence quarters at her new official duty station.¹ We find that she is entitled to reimbursement for only one househunting trip.

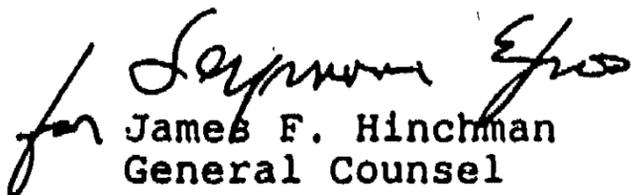
Ms. Foulk's travel authorization provided for a househunting trip not to exceed 3 days beginning on or about May 10, 1991. Ms. Foulk and her spouse traveled to Crawford, Nebraska, from Columbus, Nebraska, on May 10 and began working with a realtor to set up appointments to view real estate in the vicinity the next day. During the night severe flooding occurred. The next day phone lines were down and several of the main roads were inaccessible, preventing the Foulks from keeping their appointments. They decided to return to the old duty station in Columbus and try again at another time. On May 22 the Foulks returned to Crawford to seek residence quarters for the second time.

¹The matter was referred here by an authorized certifying officer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, New Orleans, Louisiana, with reference FSD-1 WDM.

Ms. Foulk submitted a travel voucher for each househunting trip. The voucher for the first trip was for 1-3/4 days and the second was for 2-1/4 days. The agency reimbursed Ms. Foulk for the second househunting trip. Ms. Foulk requests reimbursement for both trips based on the uncontested fact that househunting could not be engaged in during the first trip due to the flood conditions which reportedly resulted in the President designating the area a disaster.

The travel and transportation of Ms. Foulk and her husband may not be reimbursed for two househunting trips because both statutory and regulatory provisions specifically limit reimbursement of expenses incurred in seeking residence quarters at a new official station to one round trip in connection with each change of station. 5 U.S.C. § 5724a(a)(2) (1988); Federal Travel Regulations, 41 C.F.R. § 302-4.1(a) (1991). See also Riva Fralick, et al., 64 Comp. Gen. 472 (1985). Further, in 47 Comp. Gen. 189 (1967), we held that househunting could not extend over several trips until the then-applicable maximum of 6 days' per diem reimbursement for employee and spouse was exhausted, even if transportation expenses were paid only for the first trip. Since only one round trip is authorized under the law, the allowable calendar days for per diem necessarily must run consecutively. See also Collen A. Small, B-202506, Aug. 20, 1981; Jerry L. Long, B-196153, Feb. 12, 1980. Therefore, we are without authority to allow reimbursement for transportation and per diem for more than one trip.

We note, however, that there is no requirement that only the first trip taken may be reimbursed. Therefore, we have no objection to the agency's reimbursement of Ms. Foulk's second, longer househunting trip since the first was shortened due to the weather conditions.


for James F. Hinchman
General Counsel