

DECISION



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

FILE: B-183489

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097/24
DATE: JUN 30 1975 497/24

MATTER OF: Loss of advance travel funds by traveler

DIGEST: In absence of authority otherwise, head of an agency must recoup advance travel funds from employee from whom funds were stolen. See Federal Travel Regulations (FPMR 101-7) para. 1-10.3.c (May 1973). Advanced travel funds are a loan for personal benefit of traveler who would otherwise expend personal funds for which he would later be reimbursed.

This decision to the President, Inter-American Foundation, is in response to a request by the General Services Officer of that agency regarding the liability of an employee for the advance of travel funds stolen from his apartment. We are advised that Mr. Anthony Gomes, an employee of the Inter-American Foundation, in connection with his official travel to several foreign countries between November 23 and December 19, 1974, was advanced travel funds in the amount of \$768.80. Prior to his departure he cashed the U.S. Treasury check for this amount, purchased Brazilian Cruzeiros and Argentina pesos, each currency being in the equivalent amount of \$100 (U.S.) and had the remainder in U.S. currency. On November 22, 1974, the night before his scheduled departure, Mr. Gomes' apartment, located in Washington, D.C., was broken into and the money which was advanced to him for travel purposes was stolen. A copy of the police report describing the circumstances of the theft accompanied the letter of the General Services Officer.

The opinion of this Office is requested as to whether Mr. Gomes is obligated to reimburse the Government for the amount of the advanced travel funds. It is suggested that although it is customary to purchase travelers checks before going abroad, in this case because of the difficulty in cashing travelers checks in the areas where Mr. Gomes would be going, it was advantageous to use cash over travelers checks.

The Federal Travel Regulation (FPMR 101-7) para. 1-10.3 (May 1973) provides authority to advance funds to any person entitled to pay for such costs as the employee would incur. With

respect to the recovery of advances, the regulation provides in pertinent part: "It shall be the responsibility of the head of each agency or his designee to ensure that the amount previously advanced is deducted from the total expenses allowed or that it is otherwise recovered." FTR para. 1-10.3.c(1). It also provides that advances not fully recovered by deduction from reimbursement vouchers or voluntary payments shall be deducted from the salary due or retirement credit or otherwise of the person to whom the advance was made.

The regulation contains no provision concerning the responsibility of the employee in the event the money advanced to him is lost for any reason. Funds for official travel purposes are advanced to the traveler only when warranted and are to be held to a minimum. Customarily, the traveler must request the advance to be used in lieu of his own resources which would otherwise be reimbursed at the conclusion of the travel. Thus an advance is in the nature of a loan for the personal benefit of the employee. If an advance is warranted but it is deemed that the interests of the Government would not be fully protected, a bond or other security can be required. See FTR para. 1-10.3.c(3).

Although the loss of advance travel funds such as in this case is regretted, we find no authority to excuse the employee from accounting for the funds. In this regard, the regulation is clear. Accordingly, the advance travel funds must be promptly recovered from Mr. Gomes as provided in FTR para. 1-10.c(3) and GAO Policies and Procedures Manual for Guidance of Federal Agencies, title 7, § 25.6.

R. F. KELLER

Deputy

Comptroller General
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