

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

L. H. Shultz P. L. T.
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FILE: B-192531

DATE: February 5, 1979

MATTER OF: Mr. Phillip C. McGuire - [Relocation ^{Land}
Househunting expenses of ^{is} spouse ^{who}]]

DIGEST: Employee authorized a househunting trip upon change of duty station who made a trip for the purpose of seeking such permanent residence and temporary quarters for himself is not authorized an additional round trip by his spouse to culminate the purchase of the residence.

B-162503, June 12, 1969.

This action is in response to a letter dated July 22, 1978, from Ms. Marie A. Bell, Authorized Certifying Officer, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Department of the Treasury, requesting a decision concerning the propriety of making payment on a voucher in the amount of \$176, in favor of Mr. Phillip C. McGuire, an employee of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. The voucher represented expenses incurred by the employee's wife in connection with househunting incident to an official change of duty station.

The submission indicates that Mr. McGuire was transferred on October 4, 1977, from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Washington, D.C. On October 30, 1977, he traveled to Washington alone to seek a permanent residence for his family and temporary quarters for himself until he sold his Cincinnati residence. After contracting for sale of the old residence, his wife traveled to Washington in January 1978 to culminate the purchase of their new residence. The employee contends in effect that under his agency's regulations both he and his wife are entitled to one round trip to seek a new residence, that there is no requirement that they travel together or at the same time, and that the cost to the Government for transportation would be the same regardless when the trip is performed.

Under the provisions of subsection 5724a(a)(2) of title 5, United States Code, which is implemented by Federal Travel Regulations (FPMR 101-7) (FTR), Chapter 2, Part 4 (May 1973), an employee and his spouse may be authorized one round trip to seek permanent residence quarters at a duty station. FTR para. 2-4.1 (May 1973), establishes the general policy for authorizing travel to seek residence quarters and provides in pertinent part:

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"a. Payment of travel and transportation expenses of the employee and spouse traveling together, or the employee or spouse traveling individually in lieu of travel by the other or together, for one round trip between the localities of the old and new duty stations for the purpose of seeking residence quarters, may be authorized when circumstances warrant. A round trip by the employee for this purpose, when authorized, must be accomplished prior to his reporting to the new official station. Such a round trip by the spouse, when authorized in lieu of a round trip by or with the employee, may be accomplished at any time before relocation of the family to the new official station * * *." (Emphasis added.)

Under the statute and the regulations, the trip taken by Mr. McGuire's wife cannot be regarded as being made for the purpose of seeking permanent residence quarters. Her round trip was not authorized in lieu of a round trip by or with the employee. Ordinarily, a trip for the purpose of searching for a house would end no later than the date of the execution of the sales contracts where the purchase of a house is involved. A trip made to make a final inspection, arrange home financing, and execute the settlement documentation is beyond the scope of subsection 5724a(a)(2) of title 5, United States Code. B-162503, June 12, 1969.

Accordingly, the employee may not be reimbursed those expenses and the voucher accompanying the submission will be retained in this Office.


R. F. K. Miller
Deputy Comptroller General
of the United States