



The Comptroller General
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

DANA

Decision

Matter of: Tracy L. Huckaby - Reimbursement of
passport related fees
File: B-225992
Date: July 13, 1987

DIGEST

Employee was scheduled for overseas temporary duty assignment on very short notice. Employee's travel required her to have a passport but time was not available for the normal 30 days required for passport processing. To ensure timely delivery of her birth certificate, which was necessary to obtain passport, employee wired fee through Western Union and seeks reimbursement for wire service fee. Reimbursement is authorized under para. 1-9.1d of the Federal Travel Regulations based on the agency's determination that the employee's action was necessary to the transaction of official business.

DECISION

This decision is issued in response to a request from the Finance and Accounting Officer, Central Security Service, National Security Agency, for an advance decision concerning the legality of reimbursing an employee for wire service expenses incurred in obtaining a birth certificate which was necessary for the issuance of an official passport. The passport was needed for official duty abroad. We hold that the employee is entitled to reimbursement for these travel expenses in view of the agency's determination that under the circumstances, they were necessarily incurred in obtaining a passport that was required for the performance of official travel.

BACKGROUND

The question in this case arose in connection with Ms. Tracy L. Huckaby's temporary duty assignment involving travel to England, on August 2, 1986, which was ordered with short advance notice to the employee. The temporary duty assignment to a foreign country made it necessary for Ms. Huckaby to have an official passport, and time constraints would not allow for the normal 30-day passport processing time. In order to ensure timely delivery of her birth certificate, possession of which was necessary in

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order to obtain the passport, Ms. Huckaby had the fee for the certificate sent by moneygram through Western Union at a cost of \$41.90. It is reimbursement for this moneygram charge for which Ms. Huckaby has submitted a supplemental voucher which is the subject of this decision.

Federal employees traveling on government business outside the United States are entitled to free travel documents pursuant to 22 U.S.C. § 214 (1982). Under U.S. State Department regulations implementing that statute, official passports are furnished at no cost to federal employees traveling on government business. 22 C.F.R. § 51.63(a)(1) (1986).

The Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), incorp. by ref., 41 C.F.R. § 101-7.003 (1986), issued pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 5706 (1982) provide for agency reimbursement of employee travel for only those "expenses essential to the transacting of official business." FTR para. 1-1.3(b). The regulations permit agency reimbursement to the employee of fees paid in connection with the issuance of passports, costs for photographs for passports and the costs of securing certificates of birth, health, and identity. FTR 1-9.1(c)(4). Additionally, FTR para. 1-9.1d contains language authorizing payment for miscellaneous expenses associated with official travel. For civilian employees of the Department of Defense, both of these regulations are reflected in paragraph C4709 of Volume 2 of the Joint Travel Regulations.

In William T. Kemp, B-223186, February 27, 1987, we held that payment for travel expenses incurred in securing a visa for official travel was warranted in circumstances where an employee had to travel to a location away from his permanent duty station in order to obtain a visa necessary for the performance of other official travel. That case involved an employee who was issued temporary duty orders for urgent travel to Madrid, Spain, who did not have the necessary visa for entering that country and for whom time constraints prevented procuring a visa through normal procedures.

Consistent with our holding in Kemp, supra, the above cited regulations provide a basis for reimbursing expenses such as those incurred by Ms. Huckaby in obtaining an urgently needed document necessary for the procuring of a passport. The agency has indicated that it was necessary for Ms. Huckaby to obtain a passport in order to perform official travel to England. The passport could not be obtained without a birth certificate. We are advised that the travel was authorized on very short notice and the record supports a finding that it was appropriate for Ms. Huckaby to use wire service to obtain the necessary birth certificate in order to procure the passport in time

to meet those travel requirements. Under these circumstances, Ms. Huckaby's voucher for moneygram expenses and the cost of securing the birth certificate may be certified for payment in the amount of \$41.90.

Milton J. Fowler
for Comptroller General
of the United States