



Comptroller General
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

151651

1011:

Decision

Matter of: Kit L. Cline and Gary W. Clark

File: B-256126

Date: May 4, 1994

DIGEST

When a transferred employee is authorized to move his household goods under a government bill of lading (GBL), and he chooses to move himself, he is entitled to be reimbursed only for his actual expenses not to exceed what the government would have paid to move the goods by commercial carrier using the GBL method.

DECISION

This decision is in response to a request from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), for a determination as to whether two of its employees, Kit L. Cline, and Gary W. Clark, may be reimbursed additional amounts for shipment of their household goods incident to permanent changes of station.¹ For the reasons that follow, the employees' reimbursement is limited to their actual expenses.

Kit L. Cline

Mr. Cline was transferred in the interest of the government from Fort Meade, South Dakota, to Knoxville, Iowa, in August 1992. Mr. Cline's travel orders authorized him to ship 13,500 pounds of household goods and were noted to "Consult Supply Service for method of shipment." A cost comparison was prepared by the General Services Administration (GSA) on behalf of the VA on August 28, 1992, which showed that the government bill of lading (GBL) method was the cheapest method of shipment. Under the GBL method, the government makes all the shipping arrangements. His travel orders were amended on September 24, 1992, to authorize shipment by the GBL method.

Mr. Cline chose to rent a vehicle and move his own household goods at an actual cost of \$707.20. His shipment weighed

¹The request was sent in by Harlan R. Hively, Director, VA Finance Center, Austin, Texas. Reference: (104/00).

10,020 pounds. He claimed reimbursement of \$2,985.40 as the pro-rated cost of shipping 10,020 pounds of household goods by the GBL method. The VA allowed his actual cost of \$707.20 and suspended the difference of \$2,278.20. Mr. Cline has reclaimed the latter amount.

Mr. Cline's request for reimbursement was denied by the VA on the basis of decisions of this Office which limit his reimbursement to his actual expenses. Mr. Cline contends that he is entitled to pro-rata reimbursement since he followed the provisions of the Federal Travel Regulation.

Gary W. Clark, Sr.

Mr. Clark was notified November 14, 1991, that his transfer from a position with the Department of Agriculture in Conyers, Georgia, to a position with the VA in Columbia, South Carolina, had been approved. A cost comparison was prepared by GSA on behalf of the VA on December 10, 1991, which showed that the GBL method was the approved method for shipping Mr. Clark's household goods between these two points. Travel orders were issued December 5, 1991, which authorized Mr. Clark to ship 18,000 pounds of household goods. As in the case of Mr. Cline, the travel order noted that the employee should consult Supply Service for method of shipment.

Prior to receipt of his travel orders, however, on November 29, 1991, Mr. Clark moved his own household goods by rental truck at an actual cost of \$315.80. In addition to the actual cost, Mr. Clark requested reimbursement of \$2,356.72 at the commuted rate for 7,120 pounds, plus \$600 for packing, loading and unloading by himself and his family and other expenses. The VA allowed the actual cost of \$315.80, but suspended the balance of the claim of \$3,200.72 on the basis of decisions of this Office which limit reimbursement to the employee's actual expenses. The record does not contain a rebuttal from Mr. Clark.

Opinion

When authorizing an employee to move at government expense, an agency is required to determine which of two systems, the commuted rate or GBL, will result in less cost to the government. 41 C.F.R. § 101-40.203-4 (1993); Mark R. Dulin, B-230726, Oct. 3, 1989. When GSA furnishes cost comparisons between the GBL method and the commuted rate system to agencies, the employing agency makes the final determination as to the method of shipment to be authorized. 41 C.F.R. §§ 101-40.200, 101-40.203-2(a) (1993). The regulation is clear that it is the responsibility of the employing agency to determine the method of shipment based on a cost

comparison. The employee is not given the option to choose the method of shipment that best suits him.

Once the GBL method is authorized, if the employee chooses to move his household goods by some other means, the government's financial responsibility toward the employee for shipping costs is limited to the cost which the government would have incurred had the household goods been moved under a GBL by the lowest cost carrier providing the level of service required by the agency at the time the GBL method was authorized. 41 C.F.R. § 101-40.203-2(b) (1993). The regulations further provide that where an employee chooses to move the household goods himself by rental truck, trailer, or private conveyance, his reimbursement is limited to his actual expenses, such as vehicle rental fees, packaging, fuel, tolls, etc., not to exceed what it would have cost the government to move the goods by commercial carrier. 41 C.F.R. § 101-40.203-2(d) (1993). See also Charles L. Wallace, B-248018, June 12, 1992; Timothy Shaffer, B-223607, Dec. 24, 1986.

There is no statutory or regulatory provision that permits a pro-rata reimbursement of the GBL amount such as that claimed by Mr. Cline. Therefore, there is no authority for reimbursement on that basis. See, Timothy Shaffer, B-223607, supra.

As to Mr. Clark, his movement of his household goods prior to receipt of his travel orders, or receipt of a GSA cost comparison, does not serve to increase his reimbursement. He is still limited to his actual expenses. See, John S. Phillips, 62 Comp. Gen. 375 (1983); Mark A. Smith, B-228813, Sept. 14, 1988.

Mr. Clark has also requested reimbursement for \$600 in labor costs for packing, loading, unloading, and unpacking his household goods by self and family. We have denied payment in cases such as this where the services were in the nature of gratuitous service by family members, rather than pursuant to an arms-length contract. Jerrold Schroeder, B-226868, Nov. 4, 1988. Mr. Clark may be reimbursed for the cost of packing materials, if any, upon presentation of adequate proof of purchase.

Accordingly, Mr. Cline's and Mr. Clark's reimbursement for shipment of their household goods is limited to their actual cost as stated above.

Seymour S. Pao

Robert P. Murphy
Acting General Counsel