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DECISION



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

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FILE: B-192617

DATE: April 20, 1979

MATTER OF: *Entitlement to* Melvin P. Koenig *2* Expenses incurred incident
to house-hunting trip *]*

DIGEST: Civilian employee of the Department of the Air Force made house-hunting trip prior to the signing of a transportation agreement or the change-of-station order. Employee is not entitled to reimbursement even though the trip allegedly saved the Government money since no authorization for the trip was given by an official vested with that responsibility prior to the trip.

This action concerns the request of Charles F. Potts, Chief, Accounting and Finance Branch, Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB), New Mexico, for an advance decision concerning the claim of Melvin P. Koenig, a civilian employee of the Air Force, for necessary expenses for a house-hunting trip incident to a permanent change of station (PCS). The request was forwarded here by the Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee, PDTATAC Control No. 78-29. *A6601413*

Mr. Koenig was transferred from Culver City, California, to Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, under change-of-station order A-801, dated April 26, 1977, issued by Headquarters, Air Force Contract Management Division (HQ AFCMD), Kirtland AFB. The house-hunting trip, which was not authorized by the travel order, occurred during March 11-13, 1977, and March 25-28, before Mr. Koenig signed a transportation agreement on April 9, 1977. Mr. Koenig's travel order was amended May 20, 1977, to authorize a house-hunting trip. Since the house-hunting trip was made before the transportation agreement was signed and the travel order was issued, Mr. Koenig was not reimbursed for his expenses during the trip.

Mr. Koenig believes that, although the transportation agreement was not signed on time, he should be reimbursed for the trip for the following reasons. A request for Personnel Action (SF 51) for the reassignment, dated March 8, 1977, was signed by Lt. Col. Alewine, AFCMD, Director of Management Services. By letter dated March 10, 1977, "4900 ABW/DPC" was notified that the Career Programs Board with the concurrence of the Chief of Staff had approved the reassignment and that the

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B-192617

approval includes all normal permanent change-of-station and travel allowances. A memorandum dated March 8, 1977, from I. J. Hayden, COPPER CAP Career Adviser, stated that all parties agreed to the reassignment. Also, after being accepted into the COPPER CAP Program, Mr. Koenig signed a Mobility Agreement, dated January 4, 1974, which gave the COPPER CAP Review Board the right to transfer Mr. Koenig without a requirement for further agreement. Mr. Koenig believes that the cited documents show that his formal notification date and travel allowances were approved before March 11, 1977. Finally, Mr. Koenig alleges that if he had not taken the house-hunting trip when he did, he would have had trouble moving in before the transfer date. In this connection he states that if the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR) had been followed to the letter it would have cost the Government more money because, without finding permanent quarters on his house-hunting trip, he would have had to occupy temporary quarters for 30 days and would have been entitled to the allowance covering such occupancy. Mr. Koenig claims that he also saved the Government about \$156 in airfares because he made his house-hunting trip in connection with a temporary duty assignment to Washington, D.C.

Paragraph C4107-6, Volume 2, JTR (ch. 131, September 1, 1976), provides:

"REQUIREMENTS. A trip for finding permanent residence quarters will not be permitted at Government expense until after an employee has agreed to the transfer and the date of the transfer has been established. No travel will be authorized under circumstances where the purpose of the trip is to permit the employee to decide whether he will accept the transfer. Travel will be authorized for the purpose of seeking a permanent residence incident to a permanent change of station only."

Paragraph C4107-8, Volume 2, JTR (ch. 131, September 1, 1976), provides:

"TRAVEL ORDER REQUIREMENTS. Authorization for the advance round trip, mode of transportation, and period of time allowed for the trip will be included in the permanent change-of-station travel order. The trip will not be made at Government expense unless the travel order includes the duty reporting

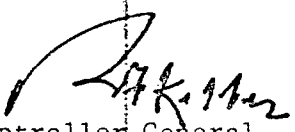
B-192617

date at the new duty station and indicates that the employee has signed the required agreement. An employee will be in a duty status at no charge to leave during the authorized round trip period of absence."

We have held that in the absence of authorization prior to the performance of the trip, by an official vested with authority to grant such authorization, house-hunting trip expenses may not be reimbursed. B-182508, June 3, 1975. In certain cases, however, we have allowed the payment of expenses for a house-hunting trip, notwithstanding the fact that no written authorization had been issued prior to the trip, where the employee was verbally authorized to make the trip by a responsible official of the agency with competent authority before it was taken, and the manner in which it was taken was in the best interests of the agency.

In this case the only evidence of authorization prior to the trip is the memorandum from Lt. Col. Alewine to 4900 ABW/DPC dated March 10, 1977, that refers to approval of all normal permanent change-of-station and travel allowances. However, this approval does not meet the requirements for authorization because it was not sent to Mr. Koenig and he could not have received it before the first house-hunting trip, and it does not specifically refer to a house-hunting trip. The change-of-station order was dated April 26, 1977, and the transportation agreement was not signed until after the trip. Finally, as to Mr. Koenig's suggestion for an after-fact consideration of the relative costs of a house-hunting trip, we have held that this places an unduly heavy burden upon an employee with respect to locating and purchasing a residence during the course of such independent house-hunting efforts as he may undertake. We also have held that the requirement for advance authorization protects the employee from possibly expending his own time and funds in seeking a new residence. See B-185511, March 3, 1976.

Accordingly, since no authorization was given for the house-hunting trip prior to such trip, Mr. Koenig's claim for reimbursement may not be paid.


Deputy Comptroller General
of the United States