

**DECISION**



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

FILE: B-199304

DATE: March 31, 1981

MATTER OF: Willard L. Steenhout <sup>Request for</sup> Relocation Expenses -  
House Sale - Collateral Transaction ]

**DIGEST:** Transferred employee's costs of assuming loan on house located at old duty station, accepted as partial payment for his own residence from buyers unable to obtain sufficient financing, may not be reimbursed. Under FTR, reimbursement is authorized only for expenses associated with one piece of real estate at old and new duty stations, and is not authorized for unusual expenses incurred by an employee due to difficulties involved in his real estate transaction.

This decision is in response to a request for an advance decision from Mr. H. Larry Jordan, an authorized certifying officer with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Mr. Jordan has asked whether he should certify for payment a voucher submitted by Mr. Willard L. Steenhout, an employee of the Forest Service. Mr. Steenhout, who was transferred from Baker, Oregon, to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in September 1979, is claiming certain expenses he incurred in assuming the outstanding mortgage on a home in Baker he took as partial payment from the buyers of his former home. Specifically, he is requesting reimbursement of \$78 he paid as an escrow fee, \$3.50 for recording the deed, and \$12.01 for a credit report.

Mr. Steenhout's claim was denied by officials at the Wallowa - Whitman National Forest in Baker, Oregon, on the basis of paragraph 2-6.1 of the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) which authorizes reimbursement for the expenses required to be paid by an employee in connection with the sale of one residence at his old official station and for the purchase of one dwelling at his new official station. In a subsequent denial from the USDA National Finance Center, reference was made to 48 Comp. Gen. 419 (1968) which involved an employee's claim for reimbursement of the expenses of selling a parcel of land he had accepted in partial payment for his residence at his old duty station. We denied that claim because the expenses were not connected

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with the sale of the employee's residence but rather with another entirely separate transaction.

Mr. Steenhout contends that he is entitled to reimbursement because the expenses he claims were incurred as part of the sale of one residence. He contends that the facts of his situation differ from those in 48 Comp. Gen. 419 in that he is not claiming the expenses of selling the property he took as partial payment.

We do not agree. In both situations, an employee, in order to complete the sale of his residence at his old duty station, accepted real estate as partial payment for that residence. The only distinction between the cases is that the expenses claimed in 48 Comp. Gen. 419 were related to disposing of the real estate, while Mr. Steenhout has claimed expenses related to acquiring the second piece of real estate. We do not believe that the distinction is significant. The FTR authorizes reimbursement of expenses relating to one piece of real estate at both the old and the new duty station, not two. Therefore, we hold that no expenses related to a second piece of real estate at either duty station may be reimbursed.

Additionally, part 6 of FTR chapter 2 authorizes reimbursement for only certain expenses connected with the sale or purchase of a residence. While reimbursement is not limited to those expenses specifically mentioned we do not believe that the regulations authorize reimbursement of unusual expenses incurred by an employee due to difficulties involved in his particular real estate transaction. In B-165686, December 20, 1968, we stated:

"Reimbursable costs are only those which are normally connected with a real estate transaction in the area concerned and not extraordinary costs which may arise in connection with the consummation of a particular transaction."

Mr. Steenhout reports he accepted a house as partial payment because his only buyer could not obtain sufficient financing. In accord with the above we believe that Mr. Steenhout's expenses in accepting the house as partial payment are the type of unusual costs that are associated with a

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particular transaction, and are not reimbursable under the Federal Travel Regulations.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Milton J. Forster". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States