



The Comptroller General  
of the United States  
Washington, D.C. 20548

# Decision

Matter of: Alyan R. Hill - Travel - Baggage Handling Fees -  
Handicapped Employee  
File: B-229436  
Date: February 9, 1989

## DIGEST

Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 an employee confined to a wheelchair may be reimbursed baggage handling fees he incurred at airports on temporary duty travel, but only to the extent that these fees were incurred as the result of his disability and were higher than those that would be incurred by a nondisabled person.

## DECISION

In this decision, we hold that to the extent a handicapped employee traveling on official business incurs higher fees for personal baggage handling as a result of his disability than would a nondisabled person, he may be reimbursed for the difference under the authority of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.1/

Mr. Alyan R. Hill is a handicapped employee confined to a wheelchair. While on temporary duty travel during March 23-27, 1987, he incurred personal baggage handling fees totaling \$12 at airports in Albuquerque and New Orleans because his handicap prevented him from carrying his baggage to and from the airports to awaiting vehicles.2/

The employing office denied reimbursement, since personal baggage handling tips and fees are reimbursed to an employee as part of his per diem or actual subsistence expenses without any additional allowance. See Federal Travel

1/ Mr. Roger M. Sargent, Director, Financial Management Division, Department of Energy, Albuquerque Operations Office, requested our decision.

2/ Apparently, he paid \$3 each time his baggage was carried for him.

Regulations (FTR), paras. 1-7.1b and 1-8.2b (Supp. 1, November 1, 1981), incorp. by ref., 41 C.F.R. 101-7.003 (1986); Johnston E. Luton, B-182853, Jan. 30, 1976. The agency, however, states that because a person in a wheelchair is unable to carry baggage to and from a car some assistance should be available for additional needed expenses.

We have held that under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq., an agency may expend appropriated funds to reasonably accommodate the physical limitations of handicapped employees even if such expenditures could not be authorized for a nonhandicapped employee. See e.g., 63 Comp. Gen. 115 (1983); Alex Zazow, 59 Comp. Gen. 461 (1980). Such expenditures must not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the agency's programs and must be directly related to the nature of the employee's handicap. See Norma Depoyan, 64 Comp. Gen. 30 (1984). The agency expenditure must be directed at ameliorating an impediment to the handicapped employee's performance of duty; the handicapped employee should not be reimbursed costs necessarily incurred by all employees regardless of disability. See 63 Comp. Gen. 270 (1984).

Under the provisions of the FTR, baggage fees and tips incurred by an employee for handling his or her personal baggage are reimbursed as part of per diem or actual subsistence allowances. Therefore, Mr. Hill already has received a reimbursement which is considered to include an amount for the ordinary cost of baggage handling at an airport. If, however, Mr. Hill incurred baggage handling expenses of an unusual nature as a direct result of his handicap, then under the authority of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, we would not object to his receiving the difference between the ordinary baggage handling fee and what he was required to pay. See 63 Comp. Gen. at 274.



Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States