

# Board of Contract Appeals

General Services Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20405

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January 19, 2001

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GSBCA 15458-TRAV

In the Matter of RONALD J. ANSON

Ronald J. Anson, Washington, DC, Claimant.

Danny A. Harris, Director, Financial Systems Operations, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Department of Education, Washington, DC, appearing for Department of Education.

**GOODMAN**, Board Judge.

Claimant, Ronald J. Anson, is an employee of the Department of Education. The agency has denied his request for reimbursement of certain costs arising from official travel, and he has requested this Board to review the agency's decision.

## Factual Background

On December 9-12, 1997, claimant accomplished official travel from his duty station in Washington, D.C., to attend a conference in Seattle, Washington. He performed this travel at the request of his supervisor, who approved the travel in advance, and whom he accompanied to Seattle. He followed all applicable procedures for obtaining a ticket from a contract carrier. Claimant departed from and returned to Dulles International Airport.

When he submitted his travel voucher, the agency's travel official only partially reimbursed the cost of the airfare. Because the Washington, D.C., area is also served by Reagan National Airport, the travel official reimbursed claimant only the round-trip airfare from that airport to Seattle, and denied reimbursement of \$420, the difference between claimant's fare and the fare between Reagan National Airport and Seattle. The basis of the denial was that the agency's desk reference guide for travel states:

Travelers should fly from the airport that is the most cost efficient to [the agency].

. . . .

Employees will be responsible for paying all excessive costs . . . .

Department of Education, Desk Reference Guide-Travel Management 4, 10 (1994) (hereinafter, Guide). Accordingly, the travel official determined that claimant had "not demonstrated where taking the higher cost flight proved to be most cost efficient to the Department."

### Discussion

Claimant accompanied his supervisor at her request on official travel. The Washington, D.C., area is served by three airports - Dulles International, Reagan National, and Baltimore-Washington International. At the time the official travel was accomplished, the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) contained the following provision:

When . . . separate contract fares apply for specific airports in selected cities served by more than one airport, travelers may (without further justification) use the airport which best suits their needs.

41 CFR 301-15.24 (g) (1997).

Claimant alleges, in effect, that flying from and to Dulles International Airport best suited his needs, as he traveled with his supervisor, who approved his travel in advance and requested that he travel with her. The agency does not contest this allegation. Claimant flew on a contract carrier. According to the above regulation, he needed no further justification for taking the flight that he took, even if a less costly contract carrier was available from another airport.

A copy of the agency's desk reference guide for travel, on which the agency now relies for denying full reimbursement, has been provided to the Board. The introduction to this publication states:

This Guide provides a comprehensive documentation of [the agency's] travel policies in a simple and concise manner. . . . The Guide was developed based on a review of [the agency's] travel policy memoranda, FTR, and information gathered through interviews with [agency] representatives who formulate and administer travel policy.

#### Guide 1.

The portions relied upon by the agency read more fully:

[Agency] travelers are required by law to use the most expeditious and cost efficient means of transportation in conducting official travel. Usually, this will be a common carrier. Traveler convenience alone does not justify using high cost transportation. . . . Airlines are normally used for long distance travel since it usually results in the lowest overall cost. Travelers should fly from the airport that is the most cost-efficient to [the agency].

.....

An employee traveling on official business is expected to exercise the same care and reasonableness in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business. The traveler will limit expenses to those that are essential to the transaction of official business. Employees will be responsible for paying all excessive costs that result from personal preference.

Guide 4, 10.

The agency's decision to deny reimbursement of claimant's claim is incorrect. The FTR allows him to fly from any airport which serves his city without further justification, as long as doing so best suits his needs. The provision in the agency desk reference which the agency appears to interpret as requiring him to fly from the airport offering the lower fare is in conflict with the FTR. Further, the provision cited by the agency requiring an employee to pay for "excessive costs" refers to excessive costs that result from "personal preference." Claimant flew from Dulles at the request of his supervisor, not as the result of personal preference.

Decision

The claim is granted. The agency should reimburse claimant \$420.

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ALLAN H. GOODMAN  
Board Judge