



AFGE Council 222
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To:
cc:
Subject: E:Alert! Do you use your cell phone while traveling?



(<http://afgecouncil222.com>)

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E:Alert - Do you use your cell phone while traveling?

If you use your cell phone while traveling for HUD, please read on. Management may try to implement a new phone reimbursement policy soon. We believe implementation without negotiation is illegal. But while we fight it, we want to provide you with tips for completing your travel voucher.

Basic rules for telephone reimbursement:

The HUD/AFGE Agreement at Section 25.12 states that travelers may receive reimbursement for: one personal phone call per day; to the vicinity of the employee's permanent duty station or residence; for an average of \$7.00 per day. Additionally, the travel voucher must show the points between which service was rendered, the cost and the date of each call.

Management has threatened to enforce another part of the Agreement at 25.12(2). This section authorizes the use of "commercial" telephones. Management is arguing that travelers are limited to commercial telephones, and may not use personal cell phones. However, Management has been reimbursing employees for calls made from personal cell phones for many years. Further, on the CFO's website at <http://hudweb.hud.gov/po/f/travel/qa1.cfm>, Management specifically authorizes the use of phone cards. We do not believe Management may now limit or change the procedures for reimbursement without negotiations.

Tips for reimbursement:

First, it is important to remember that telephone reimbursement is not like per diem, which is a set amount regardless of whether you spend that much in a day or not. Rather, it is an expense, and must be treated like any other expense. Generally, this means you do not need to provide receipts for any amount under \$75, unless the claim is for lodging or transportation (but not taxis or other local transportation). But you do need to file an accurate claim, especially since you are certifying the truth and accuracy of the claim.

So, if you use your personal cell phone, note the number of minutes for the phone call. If the minutes are part of your regular plan, determine the value of your package minutes and claim the appropriate amount (i.e. Verizon averages 7.5 cents per minute, but the amount will depend on your plan). If the minutes are not part of your regular plan, claim the full per

minute cost. You do not need to submit billing statements with your voucher. But you may be audited in the future, so it remains valuable to maintain copies of your billing statements in your files.

Second, it is important to remember that you have other options. According to the CFO's website, travelers may use phone cards. Their example assumes a \$30 phone card completely used over four days of travel. Since a traveler can only claim \$7.00 per day, s/he would receive reimbursement for a total of \$28. Again, there is no requirement that you maintain a receipt of your purchase of a phone card. You can also use hotel phones. These charges will clearly appear on your hotel bill. You are required to maintain copies of your hotel receipts.

What to do if you are denied reimbursement for personal phone calls:

If you are denied reimbursement, or if Management demands copies of your cell phone bill to support reimbursement (except in the case of a post-reimbursement audit), file an individual grievance. Your Local Union can provide assistance. Please do not ask your Local to file a Grievance of the Parties (a grievance that names the Union as a party, rather than identifying an individual employee), as that negatively impacts the Union's right to file an Unfair Labor Practice charge for failure to bargain. However, if many employees file individual grievances, we may be able to combine them into a group grievance.

Moreover, keep your Local Union informed of travel reimbursement practices in your office. We do not yet know what Management plans to do. Help us protect your rights in the workplace! Talk with your Local Union representative about what else you can do to protect our working conditions.

In solidarity,



Carolyn Federoff
President, AFGC Council 222