
Defense Report

AUSA



When Military Families Are Moved the Government Should Pick Up the Bill

A recent report by a Department of Defense Committee has confirmed what service men and women have known for years—when you get orders to move to a new station the authorized repayment of expenses will not come close to covering the actual costs.

The report cites the example of a Sergeant First Class (E-7) with a family of three who gets orders to move to a new post 1500 miles away. It tallies his expenses during the five days it takes him to clear his old station after the movers load up the furniture (\$505 estimated). Assuming that the family traveled at the authorized rate of 300 miles per day it would take them five more days and \$805 for transportation, meals and lodging to reach the new station. The report then assumes the sergeant could have to spend 25 days in a motel or other temporary lodging while waiting for government quarters or to find a rented house in the civilian community. That could cost another \$2525. His total out-of-pocket expenses for the trip would be \$3835. In return the Army would reimburse him one month's quarters allowance (\$231.90) and a mileage allowance of \$412.50, leaving the sergeant to absorb \$3190.60 in costs associated with the official move.

As startling as these revelations may be they are nothing new. This sort of inequity has been part of the military compensation system as far back as anyone can remember. It is a far cry from the practice of civilian employers of moving their people entirely at company expense, often including lengthy stays in hotels and, sometimes, even underwriting the purchase of a home. It is even less generous than the reimbursement offered to federal civil service employees who are transferred. Taken in sum, the military system has the effect of forcing transferred personnel to make an involuntary contribution to the treasury that amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars every year. While military families are on the road to a new station they receive only a mileage allowance (10 cents per mile for the service member, seven cents per mile for dependents over age 12 and just 3.5 cents for the younger children). No per diem for meals and lodging is paid.

The report recommends a number of improvements—a per diem payment of \$48 per day while travelling, a realistic mileage allowance and allowances for the periods spent in temporary accommodations at the old and new stations. The changes would add a sizeable amount to the cost of maintaining our all-volunteer forces but the cost seems worthwhile. The long-standing shortcomings of the military travel system are the sort of irritant that drive good people away from military service. If we want to keep those good people we must be prepared to pay the price.