

Alaska State Legislature

Legislative Affairs Agency

Office of the Executive Director


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MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Gary Stevens
Chair, Legislative Council

FROM: Jessica Geary 
Executive Director

DATE: December 18, 2019

SUBJECT: Legislative Council Moving & Travel Policy Change – Staff Session Lodging Stipend

I was asked to determine how other states handle compensation for staff who travel to the capital city for a legislative session, as well as the lodging policies of the executive and judicial branches in Alaska. It will be no surprise to anyone that Alaska is unique in this situation. In other states, legislative staff live in the capital city or within close commuting distance. Washington State is the most similar, and when staff must commute to Olympia, they receive a \$40 per day lodging stipend. In Alaska, executive and judicial branch employees on long-term assignments may receive a lodging stipend daily rate of \$30 for non-commercial accommodations or \$45 for commercial options.

Setting a cap of \$600 per month, as has been previously suggested, would be significantly lower than what other state legislative, as well as the other Alaska branches of government employees receive. Further, it would be administratively burdensome for LAA to monitor monthly lodging receipts of more than 110 staff who relocate to Juneau for session to ensure the cap is not exceeded. Adopting Washington's rate would result in a stipend of approximately \$1,200 per month; adopting the executive branch non-commercial rate would result in an approximate monthly amount of \$900.

My recommendation is to set a lodging stipend of \$30 per day, which mirrors what other state agencies pay employees on long term travel assignments. Eligibility would be determined by whether the employee was eligible for staff relocation. Staff would need to submit a separate form to the Accounting Office at the end of each month to receive reimbursement. The lodging stipend would be available during regular legislative sessions for the period that employees are on session payroll.

I am happy to answer questions from members.

Motion: I move that Legislative Council adopt the proposed changes to the Legislative Council Moving & Travel Policy.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL MOVING AND TRAVEL POLICY

Revised December 18, 2019

I. POLICY STATEMENT

LEGISLATORS

It is the policy of the Legislative Council to provide for Legislators' personal moving and travel expenses necessary to attend legislative sessions. Moving and travel costs are allowed from a Legislator's residence in his or her home district to and from the capital city for the purpose of attending a regular session of the Legislature. Legislators may be reimbursed for flying, boating or driving to and from the Capital, and the cost of ground/ferry transportation for no more than one vehicle, as referenced in Section II. Reimbursement approved for Legislators traveling to and from the Capital shall be as follows:

- (1) Private Vehicle. Travel shall be reimbursed as provided by the U.S. General Services Administration ("GSA rate" www.gsa.gov/mileage) allowed at the time of the travel;
- (2) Private Boat. Travel shall be reimbursed at the rate of 1.5 gallons of fuel per nautical mile based on the price of fuel in the Capital during the time of travel, and based on the most direct and customary route from the Legislator's home to the Capital;
- (3) Private Aircraft. Travel by privately owned aircraft shall be reimbursed as provided by the GSA rate allowed at the time of travel, for each statute mile converted from nautical miles, based on the most direct and customary route from the Legislator's home to the Capital.

Requests for clarification of any area in this policy or questions regarding a move shall be addressed to the LAA Executive Director for written explanation. Legislators should not expect payment for costs not specifically covered in this policy without written approval from the Legislative Council chair or a designee. Legislators not in agreement with a decision made by the Executive Director may appeal to the Legislative Council chair for consideration at a future Legislative Council meeting.

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

It is the policy of Legislative Council to provide for travel and travel per diem for lodging and meal expenses for legislative staff while traveling to and from a regular legislative session. Travel expenses are limited to one trip to and from the residence of the staffer in Alaska and the Capital. Staff members may be reimbursed for flying to and from the Capital and for the cost of ground/ferry transportation for one vehicle.

Reimbursement for the cost of driving or transporting a vehicle is only authorized to and from a location on the state highway or a location which connects to the ferry system. Reimbursement

for legislative staff travel by private vehicle shall be calculated in the same manner as private vehicle travel for Legislators. Reimbursement for legislative staff traveling by private boat or private airplane must be pre-approved by the Legislative Council Chair, and if pre-approved, may be reimbursed in the same manner as private boat or private aircraft travel for Legislators. Pro-rated per diem expenses are limited to a per diem allowance for each day spent traveling to or from the Capital by the most direct route available for the type of transportation used by the employee requesting the reimbursement.

Travel and travel per diem for lodging and meal expenses for legislative staff members who are married to or a dependent of a Legislator are paid under the sections of this policy which cover reimbursement for Legislators and their families.

Legislative staff members based in the Capital during a regular legislative session are not entitled to a daily per diem allowance; however, they may receive a lodging stipend of \$30 per day. Eligibility will be determined by whether the employee was eligible for staff relocation.

II. MOVING - LEGISLATORS ONLY

Any items that are shipped with Legislative Affairs listed as the shipper must be inspected by qualified LAA staff prior to closing of boxes for shipping.

HOUSEHOLD GOODS AND PERSONAL EFFECTS

LAA will pay for the actual and necessary expenses charged by a commercial mover for packing, transporting, and unpacking up to 3,000 pounds of household goods and personal effects, including in-transit insurance not to exceed a total cost of \$200 for a convening move and \$200 for an adjourning move, and in-transit storage up to 30 days. Storage for household goods and personal effects only in the capital city during the interim is an allowable cost and will be reviewed annually. The intent of storing these items is to eliminate or significantly reduce shipping expenses.

A pick-up by a moving company is allowed **only** at a Legislator's primary residence. If a Legislator wishes to have a pick-up made at an additional stop, he or she is responsible for paying the entire shipping bill related to that extra stop.

OFFICE MOVES to and from communities on the road system will be coordinated by LAA and the Legislative Information Offices and shall be considered the consolidated office move. Each Legislator can pack and send a maximum of 20 small file boxes and the Legislators may ship office equipment they own and use in their legislative offices with the consolidated office move. The Department of Administration, Division of Risk Management does not insure personal property. Other special provisions may be made for shipping Legislators' personal computers at the discretion of the Presiding Officers. Legislators will be notified by the Information Offices as to the dates of these moves.

Legislators with, or establishing, offices in locations that are off the road system may combine their office moves with their personal moves; however, office materials must be weighed separately, or they will be applied toward a Legislator's 3,000-pound limit. An additional stop by a moving company at the Capitol is allowed.

ITEMS THAT MAY BE SHIPPED as household goods and personal effects at State expense include the following: household furnishings, small appliances, clothing, books, and similar items belonging to a member, spouse or dependent which can be legally accepted and transported as household goods and personal effects by an authorized commercial carrier in accordance with rules and regulations established or approved by the Legislative Council. Also included, but only if the Legislator has a personal vehicle in Juneau, are spare parts for privately owned motor vehicles, such as extra tires, wheels, tire chains, tools, battery chargers, accessories, etc. Household pets, up to a maximum of three, are included in this section.

ITEMS THAT MAY NOT BE SHIPPED as household goods and personal effects at State expense include the following:

- Any article not belonging to or owned by the member, his or her spouse or dependents;
- Articles that are not reasonable and necessary to have in order to conduct legislative business;
- Cordwood, firewood, or building materials (including tools, heavy equipment, and other related items);
- Property for the primary purpose of resale, disposal, or commercial use rather than for personal use by the member and his or her spouse or dependents;
- Articles acquired after the effective date of adjournment of the legislative session or articles not used in the capital city during the session;
- Articles which in normal use form an integral part of a building or structure and which in normal use cannot be taken from the premises without damage to the rest of the property on the premises;
- Hazardous materials as defined by state or federal law. The Agency will take reasonable steps, including providing support, information and assistance to Legislators and legislative staff to prevent the inadvertent shipment of hazardous materials.

TRAILERS OR TRUCKS

LAA will pay the cost of renting trailers or trucks, plus mileage at federal mileage reimbursement rate, to move household goods and tow trailers containing the household goods and personal effects of a Legislator, provided that the total cost of the move is not in excess of the cost of moving 3,000 pounds of household goods and personal effects by a commercial carrier. Trailers are considered to be part of the 3,000 pounds if they are put in closed containers or barged to their destination, unless it is necessary to do so in order to reach the nearest point that connects with a state highway or ferry system.

TRAVEL AND VEHICLES

A motor vehicle is not considered part of the 3,000-pound weight limit on household goods and personal effects if the transportation costs are paid under this section. A Legislator may receive payment for transportation costs for not more than one motor vehicle, which is registered in the name of the Legislator, his or her spouse, or dependent.

Allowable costs include:

- The cost of air or barge transportation for the vehicle from the Legislator's residence to the nearest point that connects with a state highway or ferry system provided it is less expensive than it would be to rent a car in Juneau for the duration of the legislative session;
- Highway mileage at the federal mileage reimbursement rate for the car owned by the Legislator, his or her spouse, or dependent;
- A ticket for transportation on the Alaska State Marine Highway System for the motor vehicle, including the costs of a trailer being towed by a vehicle;
- Tourist class airfare or a ticket for transportation on the Alaska State Marine Highway System for the Legislator and his or her spouse or dependents. Airline excess baggage charges will be reimbursed if the excess baggage charges are less than the cost of shipping the same items by air freight; and,
- A standard per diem for the Legislator, half of the standard per diem for his or her spouse, and an eighteen-dollar (\$18) per day per diem for each of his or her Dependents while en route, up to a maximum of five (5) days per person. Additionally, (a) upon arrival at the capital for the first session of a Legislature, a Legislator, his or her spouse, and dependents are entitled to per diem at the same rate as per diem while en route for not more than ten (10) days; (b) upon arrival at the capital for the second session of a Legislature, a Legislator, his or her spouse, and dependents are entitled to per diem at the same rate as per diem while en route for not more than five (5) days; and (c) at the end of every legislative session, a Legislator, his or her spouse, and dependents are entitled to per diem at the same rate as per diem while en route for a period not to exceed five (5) days.

III. SPECIAL SESSIONS

LEGISLATORS

Each member of the Legislature, their spouse and dependents, are entitled to receive one round-trip transportation fare equal to the cost of tourist class airline fare or a round trip ticket for transportation on the Alaska Marine Highway System for one vehicle from his or her home

district to the capital for purposes of attending special sessions of the Legislature. A standard per diem for the Legislator, half of the standard per diem for his or her spouse and an eighteen dollar (\$18) per diem for each of his or her dependents, will be allowed for his or her travel. Each member is also allowed a maximum of two hundred (200) pounds airfreight each way.

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Legislative staff members are not entitled to reimbursement for travel and travel per diem for lodging and meal expenses to attend a special session of the Legislature unless specifically authorized by the appropriate authority. Approval is not automatic and may vary between special sessions depending on considerations such as the length and subject matter of the special session, and the number of legislative staff needed.

IV. DEFINITION OF VEHICLE

A vehicle is defined as an automobile or motorcycle.

Previously amended March 28, 2017, December 20, 2016