



UNITED STATES
CIVILIAN BOARD OF CONTRACT APPEALS

December 16, 2025

CBCA 8710-RELO

In the Matter of MONICA B.

Monica B., Claimant.

Mark D. Dellinger, Director, Office of Travel Management and Policy, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, Washington, DC, appearing for Department of State.

GOODMAN, Board Judge.

Claimant is an employee of the Department of State (agency). She has asked this Board to review the agency's denial of reimbursement of costs incurred during a permanent change of station (PCS) move.

Background

Claimant was authorized PCS travel from her duty station in the continental United States (CONUS) to a new duty station outside the continental United States (OCONUS) in September 2025. Her travel orders authorized economy class air travel, which she booked on a contract carrier. After the agency ticketed her travel, claimant upgraded her agency-issued economy class ticket directly with the airline to business class without agency authorization. The total upgrade cost was \$556.50.

After travel, claimant requested reimbursement for \$300 for seat selection fees and \$80 for baggage fees on her voucher, which the agency denied. Claimant did not submit receipts for the seat selection fee or baggage fees but asked the agency to apply the "value" of the seat selection fee and the maximum reimbursable amount for baggage fees towards the cost of her upgrade. The agency denied reimbursement for both.

Claimant submitted information to this Board as to medical necessity for requiring business class travel. She stated that she did not submit this information to the agency and did not request medical accommodation before her travel because “I had a surgery on this same leg . . . in January 2024, and when I requested a business class upgrade, it was denied, so I did not request it this time.” Claimant’s Notice of Claim at 2. We review the agency’s denial as to the issues raised by claimant to the agency and therefore do not consider the issue of medical necessity.

Discussion

Seat Selection

The agency states that the purpose of the agency’s seat selection reimbursement policy is to allow travelers to be reimbursed for the costs often charged by airlines to reserve a seat in economy class in advance of travel. Agency Response at 2.

The Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM), which provides guidance for the payment of travel expenses for foreign service employees, states:

(2) Seat selection fees are not reimbursable for any segment(s) of travel:

- (a) Conducted in an indirect manner; or
- (b) For which a traveler has cost-constructed to use accommodation in business or first class; or
- (c) For which a traveler has been authorized business-class or first-class accommodations; and

(3) The “value” of a seat selection fee cannot be applied towards the cost of obtaining a ticket in an other-than-coach class of service or be considered as part of any cost-construct calculation.

14 FAM 567.2-1 ¶ d(2), (3). The FAM also provides as follows:

Receipts are required for reimbursement of seat selection fees, regardless of amount.

Id. at ¶ g.

The agency states:

[Claimant] states that she is not asking for reimbursement of her business class upgrade, but rather for the “standard seat selection fee of \$300 per leg.” There is no standard seat selection reimbursement amount, and [claimant]’s request is to apply the “value” of the seat selection fee towards her upgrade, which is not allowable per agency regulations.

. . . .

While the agency sympathizes with [claimant]’s need for additional leg room to accommodate her recent surgery, she chose not to pursue reasonable accommodation through the Department’s processes and instead, personally upgraded her official travel. The Department’s regulations specifically disallow reimbursement for seat selection fees when a traveler upgrades themselves to a higher class of service.

Agency Response at 3-4. The agency also notes that claimant did not submit a receipt for the \$300 seat selection fee as required by regulation. *Id.* at 3.

According to the above regulations, seat selection fees are not reimbursable even for authorized business-class travel, nor can the value of the seat selection be applied towards the cost of obtaining an upgrade for other-than-coach travel. Claimant does not have a receipt for the seat selection, and even with a receipt, the cost would not be reimbursable for business class travel. The agency properly determined that claimant was not entitled to reimbursement of the seat selection fee.

Baggage Fees

With regard to the claim for baggage fees, 14 FAM 568.3 states:

Receipts are required for reimbursement of checked luggage fees in any amount, including fees assessed by an air carrier to transport “authorized luggage.”

Claimant did not provide the required receipt for this expense but instead sought the maximum allowable reimbursement against the cost of her business class upgrade. Agency Response at 3. The agency properly denied her request for reimbursement of baggage fees, as claimant has not provided the required receipt.

Decision

The claim is denied.

Allan H. Goodman
ALLAN H. GOODMAN
Board Judge