
Defense Report

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Out-of-Pocket Costs of Military Transfers—Like Being Hit by a Moving Van

A very real injustice is imposed on our military personnel when their government requires that they change stations frequently but reimburses them for only about one fourth of their out-of-pocket moving expenses for each move.

A recent survey has revealed that the government reimburses service members for only one dollar of every four dollars it costs them to relocate. The survey results translate to a median unreimbursed cost of \$1,519 per move. With the average careerist moving once every two or three years during a 23-year career, these unreimbursed expenses would total between \$12,000 to \$17,000.

The survey identifies the major expenses involved as house-hunting trips in advance of actual move; transportation and lodging en route and cost of replacing or repairing lost or damaged household goods.

There are two main causes for the inadequacy of the "system" of compensating for these costs: first, the housing allowance for a family falls woefully short of today's costs of hotel/motel accommodations; and second, the actual costs of travel far exceed the service member's 13 cents-per-mile reimbursement. The military departments' efforts to secure congressional action to eliminate these discouragements to a service career have so far met with very limited success.

Although Congress authorized a four-day temporary housing entitlement for each permanent move in 1981, it has consistently refused to appropriate money to pay it. Similarly, the current budget-deficit-reduction mood seems to be driving Congress to reject even a token Administration effort to lessen the individual servicemember's burden by increasing the mileage reimbursement to 15 cents per mile—still less than the 20½ cents per mile allowed by the IRS.

This inequity which forces service members to underwrite the lion's share of the costs of official moves will continue until realistic per-mile payments are authorized, until the temporary lodging entitlement is funded, and until a system to compensate for house-hunting trips is authorized and funded.

Our soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen deserve no less.