



UNITED STATES  
CIVILIAN BOARD OF CONTRACT APPEALS

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January 13, 2025

CBCA 8226-TRAV

In the Matter of PAULETTE C.

Paulette C., Claimant.

Douglas M. Hoelscher, Chief, Compliance Audit and Policy Division, Financial Services Center, Department of Veterans Affairs, Austin, TX, appearing for Department of Veterans Affairs.

**CHADWICK**, Board Judge.

Claimant traveled in her personal vehicle from her home, which is her assigned duty station, to a three-day retreat without an approved travel authorization. The agency subsequently denied reimbursement for lodging and per diem, and claimant sought the Board's review. We deny the claim.

Background

Claimant works remotely from home in the Seattle, Washington, area and received management approval to attend a leadership retreat in Seattle in August 2024. The approval packet instructed claimant to create a travel authorization in Concur as needed. Claimant started the process in Concur, the agency's travel system, including by inserting the necessary funding information, but did not submit the authorization for approval in advance.

After the conference, the agency denied claimant's request for lodging expenses and per diem primarily on the grounds that claimant did not travel outside the "local area," defined as a fifty-mile radius from her duty station under Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) 300-3.1 (41 CFR 300-3.1 (2023)) and agency policy. The agency also noted the lack of prior authorization in Concur. Since that time, including in their filings with the Board, claimant

and the agency have debated whether claimant's travel distance actually exceeded fifty road miles due to the alleged availability or unavailability of ferry service across Puget Sound.

### Discussion

These circumstances exemplify why the Government requires employees to obtain "written or electronic authorization before incurring any travel expense" unless doing so "is not practical or possible." FTR 301-2.1 (requiring prior authorization without exception for costs of "attendance at a conference" per FTR 301-2.5(o)); *see also Patrick M. Cotton*, CBCA 6230-TRAV, 18-1 BCA ¶ 37,152, at 180,858 ("[A]n employee cannot create his/her own travel order or create entitlement to recover expenses incurred.").

Claimant admits that she "overlooked" the requirement of "administrative documentation" of "approval to travel." Claimant does not argue or present evidence that obtaining authorization through Concur was impractical or impossible. It should not be up to the agency, nor is it the Board's role, to reconstruct in hindsight a travel itinerary that we think should have been approved. Had claimant timely completed the Concur submission, any complications or disagreements relating to the fifty-mile radius or travel by road versus ferry could have been addressed ahead of time. Claimant undertook travel without prior approval by the designated official through the appropriate channel, Concur. We will not retroactively scrutinize the unauthorized expenses for some basis for reimbursement. *See, e.g., Robert L. Schieffer*, CBCA 6348-TRAV, 19-1 BCA ¶ 37,307, at 181,477 ("[F]ailure to obtain the necessary authorization precludes recovery of [the] claim." (citing *Andlen L. Rohwedder*, CBCA 6212-TRAV, 18-1 BCA ¶ 37,187, at 181,001)).

*Kyle Chadwick*

KYLE CHADWICK  
Board Judge