Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency
for the District of Columbia
Office of the Trustee

December 6, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Supervisors

FROM: Monty Wilkinson MW
Deputy Director

SUBJECT: Policy on Employee Travel Charge Cards

Attached is the updated policy on Employee Travel Cards. Please be reminded that the policy and the face of the credit card both state that the card is to be used for official government travel only. Improper use of the card, or a delinquent payment history, may subject the employee to disciplinary action.

As general guidance, cases of possible improper use of the travel card must be promptly investigated. When supervisors are notified of improper use of the card, they should meet with the employee and request an explanation in writing. If, in the judgment of the supervisor, the case involves improper use, the supervisor must consider disciplinary action. The employee is to be directed to return the credit card to the supervisor pending completion of an investigation. Martina Griggs-Johnson, Employee-Labor Relations Officer (220-5443), should be contacted for further guidance.

Since most of our employees travel infrequently, supervisors are authorized to hold employee travel cards for safe keeping until they are needed for official travel. Cards held for safe keeping should be held at the Associate Director level for each component of the agency.

Questions may be directed either to the Associate Director for Human Resources, David Orr (220-5637) or the Associate Director for Management and Administration, Jim Williams (220-5707).

Attachment

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Court Services and Offender Supervision
Administrative Policy
Travel 99-01
Employee Travel Cards

A. Employee Travel Cards

Employee Travel Cards are credit cards issued in an employee's name by a financial institution under contract with the U.S. Government. The travel cards are issued to employees who expect to travel two or more times per year. The card must be used for all official travel expenses which can be paid by credit card. Typically, this includes airline or rail tickets, lodging, rental cars, meals and other expenses to the extent the card is accepted. Cash advances may be acquired from an Automatic Teller machine (ATM) with the card and used for meals and incidental expenses (M&IE), incident to approved travel.

Use of the card for personal expenses is prohibited. The card may not be used for personal purchases or personal ATM cash advances. Misuse of the card will subject the cardholder to disciplinary action, up to and including removal. The card is to be used only to charge approved official travel-related expenses.

The use of the Travel Card is explicitly prohibited for the payment of training, conference or registration fees. Employees must request payment of these fees through the appropriate procurement process.

B. Liability for Charges Made with Employee Cards

The Government is not directly liable for any charges made using the employee travel charge card. Employees will be billed directly and are liable to the financial institution for all charges. The agency will reimburse employees in a timely manner for authorized and allowable travel expenses. The employee must pay the financial institution in full within 30 days from the statement closing date. Employees are responsible for full payment of all charges made with the card regardless of the amount reimbursed to employees.

Employees should not use their travel cards to charge expenses, such as reserving a suite of rooms for other employees, or paying for other employee's meals. Employees who do so are solely responsible for any liability which may occur if the transactions are not properly settled.

If card is lost or stolen, call 1-888-297-0782 to report the loss. You must also notify your supervisor in writing.

In the event of a disputed charge, employees should promptly contact the establishment (e.g. the hotel) which processed the charge and attempt to resolve the dispute. Employees should keep a record of all disputes and attempts to resolve the dispute. Any disputed charge, which is not successfully resolved within 30 days, should be reported to the financial institution by the employee, who should again maintain a record of all contacts. Employees may make billing inquiries and report disputes 24 hours per day, seven days a week by calling 1-888-297-0781 from within the United States. The financial institution will confirm all disputes in writing within three working days.

Once an item is identified as an "open or disputed" item, the account receives a notation and the item is assigned a date by which all research by the financial institution must be completed (typically 60 days). Until that date, the account is given a pending credit in the amount of the dispute. Amounts that have been officially disputed will not be considered delinquent.

If, within two billing cycles, the financial institution has not had a satisfactory response from the establishment with regard to the disputed amount, the charge will be reversed to the establishment and the credit made permanent. If however, the establishment supplies documentation to the financial institution showing the charge was valid, the pending credit will be re-billed and payment of the amount will be due within 30 days. Employees are responsible for resolving re-billed disputes directly with the establishments in question if they are still dissatisfied.

This policy applies to all charges, including charges for airline tickets that have been returned. If credit is not received for a returned or canceled ticket within two billing cycles, employees should contact the Travel Management Center (TMC) (Omega World Travel 202-393-8240) or the airline, as appropriate, to determine the status. If no satisfaction is received from the TMC or airline, employees should contact the Agency Program Coordinator, Sharon Humphries (220-5714), for assistance.

In the case of a lost ticket, employees must first file a Lost Ticket Application (LTA) with the airline, which may be done through the Travel Management Center and provide a copy of the LTA to the financial institution when disputing the charge. The financial institution will allow a pending credit if a copy of the LTA is on file. Because the airlines charge a minimum of $50 to process LTAs, that amount will be deducted from the pending credit once the refund is made. The cardholder is liable for this remaining charge to the account, which will be reimbursed by the Agency under appropriate circumstances as determined by the proper officials within the organization.

Employees that misuse or abuse the travel charge card, or consistently have a delinquent payment history, may be subject to disciplinary action. Revocation of employee security clearances or sanctions ranging from reprimand to removal may be considered. If an employees' account is canceled due to non-payment, that information will be provided to three regional credit bureaus regarding the employee's debt to the financial institution. The employee will receive notice from one of those credit bureaus to pay in full within 45 days or be reported to the National Credit Bureau.

C. Travel-Related and Miscellaneous Expenses

In addition to the types of travel expenses listed above, the travel card may be used for authorized "travel-related expenses." "Travel-related expenses" means any expense allowable under Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) or Agency travel policy. Examples provided in the FTR include charges for rental of computers, clerical assistance, including copying, drivers of vehicles, including taxis, and other miscellaneous expenditures. Such expenses must be approved in advance by the appropriate official whenever possible. A copy of the FTR can be referenced in the Office of the Controller (Suite 1370, 633 Indiana Avenue, NW) or in the Administrative Liaison Unit (Room 2077, 300 Indiana Avenue, NW).

In unusual cases, if employees are unable to secure advance approval for unanticipated travel-related or miscellaneous expenses, those expenses may be approved when employees voucher their travel expenses. Employees are advised, however, that when expenses are incurred which have not been previously authorized, they assume the risk of liability if the expenses are partially or fully disapproved.

D. Benefits Derived from Use of the Travel Card

Any benefit derived from use of the travel card, including frequent flyer miles awarded for airfare, hotel, rental cars or other travel-related expenses, belongs to the Government, and must be used for official travel. Any benefits are to be used for free or reduced official travel costs and may not be used for premium class upgrades.

E. Cash Advances

The ATM Cash Advance feature allows travelers to use their cards to obtain cash advances to pay for official expenses that cannot be charged using the card. Employee travel card ATM cash advances shall be used in lieu of government issued cash advances. A personal identification number (PIN) is issued for each card, and is sent to the cardholder's billing address. Cash may be obtained from ATM's worldwide. Cash obtained from an ATM is charged to the cardholder's account, and must be repaid to First Chicago. ATM cash advances may only be obtained when authorized for official travel. Withdrawals may be made between three days prior to departure and the last day of travel. The traveler's withdrawal limit is the amount approved on the travel authorization.

A fee of $2.00 is billed to the traveler's account for each withdrawal made. The fee is reimbursable and should be itemized separately when claimed on the travel voucher as a miscellaneous expense. In addition, there may be a network surcharge of $1.00 to $2.00. This amount, if billed, is also reimbursable as a miscellaneous expense.

F. Management Oversight Responsibilities

The Agency Program Coordinator (APC) is the recipient of all reports, and is responsible for promptly reviewing the reports and providing supervisory or management officials with the information upon which to act. The APC is not responsible for resolving questionable transactions or overdue accounts directly with the employee; that is the responsibility of supervisory or management officials.

The APC shall inform, by e-mail, telephone or in writing, the appropriate supervisory or management official of the following: questionable ATM or credit card transactions; pending suspensions – 60 days overdue; pending cancellation – 90 days overdue; cancellations – 120 days overdue. Supervisory and management officials shall take appropriate action to ensure that employees are meeting their responsibilities under the travel card program and that charge privileges are maintained. Ordinarily, travel advances shall not be provided to employees who have lost travel card charge privileges due to misuse or non-payment of charge card bills. It is the responsibility of supervisors and managers to inform the employees that suspension or cancellation of charge card privileges will disrupt the ability of employees to perform travel related assignments and may be cause for disciplinary action. If an employee's card has been cancelled, a government issued cash travel advance may not be authorized.

Because the use of the "office GTA" (Government Transportation Account) expends additional government resources, use of an office's GTA account for an employee whose card has been suspended or canceled due to nonpayment will be allowed only in unusual circumstances where the suspension or cancellation is not finally adjudicated.

Supervisory or management officials must notify the APC of all departing employees so those cards may be cancelled on or before the day of departure. The cardholder may forward the card, cut in two, to the APC. A card should never be forwarded in the mail/distribution in one piece.