

July 12, 2016

Dear Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed,

As you work to finalize the final Fiscal Year 2017 (FY 2017) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the undersigned unions, management organizations, and industry trade associations urge you to support Department of Defense (DoD) military and civilian employees by ending a practice that penalizes civilian employees that receive orders requiring them to travel on temporary duty for more than 30 days. Collectively, we represent more than 200,000 civilian employees and over 23,000 hotels. Specifically, we ask that you recede to Section 603 of the House FY 2017 NDAA, which would stop DoD from reducing the employee per diem allowance based on the duration of the temporary duty travel assignment.

In November 2014, DOD made changes to the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR) that included a 25 percent cut to both the per diem allowance and the lodging stipend for travel in excess of 30 days, and a 45 percent cut for travel longer than 180 days. These cuts unfairly burden DOD military and civilian employees and frustrate the ability of the hotel industry to offer a government rate for DOD travel. If savings are to be achieved through the travel budget they should not come at the expense of the people who travel for extended periods of time. The potential savings are relatively minimal in light of our overall budget challenges, and would come at the expense of the people doing complex and challenging work that is necessary to ensure that the men and women of the United States armed forces have everything they need to keep our nation safe.

Many of our organizations have polled our members and the feedback has been overwhelming in opposition to these cuts. The dominant themes in the feedback we received included the inability to identify reduced rate lodging at many of the long-term travel locations, requiring employees to stay at substandard housing, or complete an unwieldy waiver process when reduced rate lodging is not available. Another major concern is that the cuts to the per diem allowance will inevitably lead to employees who travel for long periods of time having to personally pay for expenses directly related to official travel; ultimately serving as a disincentive for employees to travel for long periods of time.

Currently, many of those who travel for long-term duty assignments do so regularly, and have a wealth of knowledge and experience, which is important to the military mission. The current cuts to the long-term travel per diem allowance creates a disincentive for these employees to continue to volunteer for these long-term travel assignments, and penalizes the military and civilian employees who have already been asked to spend a significant amount of time away from their homes and families. Many of these employees have school aged children and family obligations for which they are still responsible while on official travel.

We believe that this is a misguided solution to solve a perceived problem. If DoD had addressed this matter pre-decisionally with key stakeholder groups like us, as is called for in Executive Order 13522, then there is a strong likelihood that more reasonable, and mutually agreed upon efficiencies in the travel budget could have been achieved.

We ask that you prohibit DoD from reducing per diem based on the duration of official travel and include Section 603 of the House FY 2017 NDAA (H.R. 4909) in the final NDAA conference report. Section 1151 of the Senate FY 2017 NDAA (S. 2943) keeps the per diem cuts in place for military and civilian employees traveling for more than 30 days and only gives DoD leadership the option to use an unwieldy waiver process for the reduced per diem rate for meals and incidental expenses. DoD military and civilian employees should not have to worry if they have enough money for both their personal responsibilities at home, as well as money to cover basic necessities such as food and laundry while on official travel.

Please include Section 603 of the House FY 2017 NDAA as you work to finalize the FY 2017 NDAA Conference Report. Should you or your staff have any questions regarding this request please contact Alethea Predeoux at alethea.predeoux@afge.org or at (202) 639-6953.

Thank you.

**American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers
National Federation of Federal Employees
American Hotel and Lodging Association
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
U.S. Travel Association
Federal Managers Association**