

Member Reimbursement for Travel Expenses While on Official Business in Washington, D.C.

In December 2022, the Committee adopted new Handbook regulations authorizing use of the MRA to reimburse Members for “ordinary and necessary” expenses incurred while conducting official business in the Washington, D.C., area. The regulations were implemented based on the recommendation of the bipartisan Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress in the 117th Congress to “align Member travel reimbursement policies with those of the private and federal sector.”

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) sent a memorandum to the Committee on March 1, 2023, raising concerns that the regulations, “threaten to impose a significant administrative burden on Members of Congress, along with the CAO and Office of Financial Counseling (OFC)” and, as written, are unworkable. The CAO also identified potential security concerns arising from the retention and transfer of documentation demonstrating where Members stay and eat while in Washington, D.C., for official business, as well as concerns about possible risks to Members’ personally identifiable information, which was highlighted by the recent attack on a Member of Congress in Washington, D.C. The CAO proposed and requested an alternative expense and vouchering reimbursement process that does not require the submission of receipts to reduce these burdens and address the potential security risks.

The revised regulations, which are effective as of January 3, 2023, incorporate the CAO’s recommended changes to the reimbursement process and the Voucher Documentation Standards have been updated accordingly.

MEMBERS’ CONGRESSIONAL HANDBOOK

Ordinary and necessary expenses incurred by Members during official travel between their primary residence and Washington, D.C., as well as on official business in the Washington, D.C., area, are reimbursable. These expenses include meals, incidentals, and lodging. Lodging reimbursements may include costs associated with hotels, rentals, or other housing expenses. Members may be reimbursed for official and necessary travel expenses incurred for meals, incidentals, and lodging on days the House is in-session or when attending an official committee business meeting or hearing but not to exceed the daily rate for meals, incidentals and lodging as determined by the [General Services Administration for the Washington, D.C., area](#). Members seeking reimbursement shall submit a monthly expense voucher, and reimbursement shall not exceed expenses incurred. In lieu of receipts, Members shall certify that they have incurred eligible expenses (for which reimbursement has not otherwise been received) for which they seek reimbursement. Members whose primary residence is within 50 miles of the Capitol may not be reimbursed for lodging expenses except in extraordinary circumstances. Expense reimbursements are subject to existing state and federal tax law.

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VOUCHER DOCUMENTATION STANDARDS

Reimbursement for expenses incurred by Members while on official business in D.C. on in-session days and/or participating in an official committee meeting or hearing must include a “Members of Congress Official Business Expense Reimbursement Form” signed by the Member. Forms are to be submitted by the 15th of the following month and include the total amount incurred for all meals and lodging expenses in the previous month (for which reimbursement has not otherwise been received). Reimbursement cannot exceed expenses incurred and the total amount reimbursed for meals and incidentals and lodging for each month cannot exceed the GSA daily rate multiplied by the number of days on official business in DC.

Members are strongly encouraged to maintain records of expenses incurred, which do not have to be submitted with the form.

REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS

The CAO has created a form for Members to seek reimbursement for official and necessary travel expenses incurred for meals and incidentals (M&I) and lodging on days the House is in session and/or when participating in an official committee business meeting or hearing in an amount not to exceed the daily rates for meals, incidentals and lodging as determined by the General Services Administration for the Washington, D.C., area (attached form)¹. The form includes a monthly worksheet allowing Members to select (and certify to) the days they were required to be in Washington for official business and incurred ordinary and necessary business-related travel expenses. Session days are highlighted in red, and Members are able to differentiate (through a toggle function) between full “in-session” days (e.g., eligible for reimbursement for lodging and full M&I amounts), travel-in days (75% of M&I and up to full daily lodging), and travel out days (partial (75%) of M&I, no lodging). It also includes a “wraparound day” to account for the extra travel time and expense incurred by some Members traveling from especially long distances.

The form requires Members to certify that they were traveling to or were on official business on the referenced dates, incurred unreimbursed, official business-related travel expenses as designated, and acknowledge the truthfulness of the disclosures. The form provides Members the flexibility to claim less than the GSA pre-determined daily amount for M&I and lodging for Members whose unreimbursed travel-related expenses are lower than the GSA rate.

All reimbursements for travel-related expenses will be disclosed in the Quarterly Statement of Disbursements.

¹ The [GSA rates](#) for Washington, D.C., include the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax, and the counties of Arlington and Fairfax, in Virginia; and the counties of Montgomery and Prince George's in Maryland).

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Are Members required to seek reimbursement for travel expenses incurred while conducting official business in Washington, D.C.?

No, Members have the option to seek reimbursement for travel expenses, but it is not required.

2. The regulations state that “Lodging reimbursement may include costs associated with hotels, rentals, or other housing expenses.” What types of expenses are reimbursable?

- Hotel (and associated taxes)
- Rent
- Utilities (that would ordinarily be included in the price of a hotel room)
- Condo, Cooperative, and HOA fees (which typically cover insurance, taxes, some utilities, and maintenance of premises)
- Insurance
- Taxes

3. What is the maximum rate a Member may be reimbursed for lodging on a daily basis?

A Member may be reimbursed up to the GSA daily lodging rate to include the rate of the room and related taxes. Using January 2023 as an example, the GSA daily lodging rate was \$188. If a Member had to be in Washington, D.C., for 10 days for official business (in-session days and/or to participate in a committee hearing or meeting), he/she is eligible to seek reimbursement for a maximum of \$1,880 (GSA rate of \$188 x 10 official business days). Members may not receive reimbursement for lodging in any month in an amount that exceeds the lodging expenses they incurred during that month.

4. For a Member in a longer-term housing arrangement (e.g., monthly or yearly lease, how does he/she calculate the reimbursement amount for costs incurred?

Members are eligible to be reimbursed for the share of their monthly lodging costs attributable to ordinary and necessary business travel (e.g., days on which lodging reimbursement is otherwise eligible) up to the daily GSA lodging rate. A Member may be reimbursed for no more than the daily GSA lodging rate (for each day on official travel in D.C.) and the total lodging reimbursement in a given month cannot exceed the total lodging expense incurred in that month.

Examples:

- For January 2023, the GSA daily lodging rate was \$188.00. Member X has a monthly rental cost of \$3,100. If Member X was in Washington, D.C., for 10 session days in January 2023, then he/she is eligible to seek reimbursement for \$1,880 (January 2023 GSA rate of \$188 x 10 session days).
- For June 2023, the GSA daily lodging rate is \$258. Member Y has a monthly rental cost of \$2,000. If Member Y is in Washington, D.C., for 10 session days in June 2023, then he/she can only seek reimbursement for a maximum of \$2,000 (lodging expense incurred) even though the GSA lodging rate of \$258 per day x 10 session days is \$2,580.

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5. For a Member who owns property, how does he/she calculate the reimbursement amount for costs incurred?

Members are eligible for reimbursement for the share of their monthly housing expenses including utilities, condo, cooperative or HOA fees, insurance and taxes attributable to ordinary and necessary business travel (e.g., days on which lodging reimbursement is otherwise eligible) up to the daily GSA lodging rate (for each day on official travel in DC) and the total reimbursement in a given month cannot exceed the total housing expenses incurred in that month.

Examples:

- For January 2023, the GSA daily lodging rate was \$188. Member X incurred \$3,000 in housing expenses. If Member X was in Washington, D.C., for 10 session days in January 2023, then he/she is eligible to seek reimbursement for \$1,880 (January 2023 GSA rate of \$188 x 10 session days).
- For June 2023, the GSA daily lodging rate is \$258. Member Y incurred \$2,000 in housing expenses. If Member Y is in Washington, D.C., for 10 session days in June 2023, then he/she can only seek reimbursement for a maximum of \$2,000 (housing expenses incurred) even though the GSA lodging rate of \$258 per day x 10 session days is \$2,580.

6. Can a Member who sleeps in his/her office claim reimbursement for lodging expenses?

No, because Members who sleep in their office do not incur a lodging expense.

7. What “M&I” expenses are eligible for reimbursement?

Expenses for breakfast, lunch, dinner and related tips and taxes (no alcohol or entertainment per existing regulations). Members may also be reimbursed for groceries. Personal expenses and toiletries are not reimbursable.

8. How does a Member calculate the reimbursement amount for the cost of M&I?

A Member is eligible to be reimbursed for costs attributable to ordinary and necessary business travel (e.g., days on which M&I reimbursement is otherwise eligible) up to the daily GSA M&I rate, keeping in mind that on the first and last day of travel Members are eligible to be reimbursed for 75% of the rate, which is \$59.25 for 2023.

9. Does the rate for lodging and M&I change?

GSA does periodically update the M&I but not on a regular basis. The rate of \$79.00 for Washington, D.C., has been in place for many years. The rate for lodging changes each month. The current rates can be found on the GSA website at [GSA Rates](#).

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10. What about Members whose primary residence is within a 50-mile distance from the Capitol? Are those Members eligible to be reimbursed for lodging?

No. Members whose primary residence is within 50 miles from the Capitol are ineligible to be reimbursed for lodging expenses except in extraordinary circumstances, per the Members' Congressional Handbook regulations. Members may claim M&I associated with official business travel.

11. Are in-session days the only days defined as “official business”? What if a Member comes back on a non-session day for official business? Is reimbursement allowed then?

For the purposes of receiving reimbursement for travel expenses while in Washington, D.C., “official business” is defined as in-session days and/or participating in official committee business meetings and hearings.

12. What if a Member needs to fly in the day before or day after a session day due to flight schedules?

If a Member needs to fly in a day early in order to be in Washington, D.C., for votes the next day and/or to participate in an official committee meeting or hearing, then the Member may seek reimbursement for lodging and M&I for that travel day. In addition, if votes and/or an official committee meeting or hearing end too late for the Member to travel home that day, the Member may seek reimbursement for lodging and M&I for that day.

13. What if the Member stays in Washington, D.C., over the weekend rather than travel back to the district between session weeks?

Members can only be reimbursed for travel expenses while in Washington, D.C., on in-session days and/or participating in an official committee meeting or hearing. If a Member chooses to stay over the weekend for personal or other reasons, then the costs of lodging and M&I on those days are not reimbursable.

14. Does the limit on reimbursement for lodging and M&I while on official travel in Washington, D.C., apply to staff as well?

No, staff are not held to the same limit as Members when on official travel in Washington, D.C.

15. Can the Member use the travel card for meals/lodging in Washington, D.C.? Or do they use their own funds and get reimbursed?

The Travel Card cannot be used to pay for lodging or M&I while on official business in the Washington, D.C., area. Members must pay for lodging and/or M&I using personal funds and then seek reimbursement.

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16. Are these expense reimbursements taxable?

Expense reimbursements are subject to existing state and federal tax law. As such, applicable taxes will be withheld. Based on information and guidance received from the Internal Revenue Service, these reimbursements are considered taxable pursuant to 26 U.S.C. § 162(a).

17. Are Members allowed to submit expense reimbursement for rideshare, taxi, metro, mileage from their lodging in Washington, D.C., to the office and back? What about parking?

Members are in a travel status while in Washington, D.C., on official business and, therefore, able to seek reimbursement for local transportation expenses including rideshares, taxis, metro, or mileage to and from where they are staying and the Capitol as well as for official business within the Washington, D.C., area. Members may also be reimbursed for parking while on official business in Washington, D.C., except at the Capitol Complex where parking is provided. Local transportation expenses and parking are not considered part of the M&I or lodging formula. For local transportation and parking expenses, Members should submit receipts for reimbursement through the existing voucher process.

18. What if a Member needs to make an adjustment to an expense reimbursement form after it is submitted?

Members are encouraged to submit any adjustments to an expense reimbursement form within the same calendar quarter to ensure that the amount reimbursed is accurately reflected in the Statement of Disbursements. Adjustments submitted in subsequent calendar quarters will be shown as an adjustment to the amount previously reflected in the Statement of Disbursements.

19. When are the monthly expense reimbursement forms due? When will a Member receive his/her expense reimbursement?

Members must submit the monthly expense reimbursement form for each month no later than the 15th of the following month. Reimbursement will be made on the 1st of the following month. For example, a Member must submit his/her expense reimbursements for April no later than May 15 and will receive reimbursement for his/her April expenses on June 1st.

20. How are monthly reimbursement forms submitted?

Members or the Financial Point of Contact will submit the monthly worksheet to the Office of Financial Counseling via the AskFinancialCounseling@mail.house.gov mailbox. The expense reimbursement will not be entered into either PeopleSoft or My Expenses.