

ARMY EMERGENCY RELIEF



DATE: 9 JUNE 2021

ASSISTANCE BULLETIN NUMBER: 03-2021

SUBJECT: PET TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE GUIDANCE

1. REFERENCES.

- a. Army Regulation 930-4, dated 5 May 2019
- b. Army Emergency Relief Section Reference Manual (SRM), Chapter 2, dated 15 October 2019

2. APPLICABILITY.

These instructions apply to Headquarters AER, AER Sections, American Red Cross (ARC) and Other Military Aid Society (OMAS) offices.

3. BACKGROUND.

Due to COVID-19, Soldiers and Families have fewer options for transporting pets to and from overseas locations during a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move. As a result of reduced capacity for pet transportation on commercial and military flights, service members may find themselves having to pay more to ship their pets. While the military does have a lower-cost PCS option for shipping pets with their Army Families on government-contracted Patriot Express flights going to and from overseas, it's space available only for pets, and first come, first served. Soldiers and Families will, in some cases, need to use pet shipping services, which can cost thousands of dollars, depending on the size of the pet and where it's going to or coming from.

4. PURPOSE.

This AER Bulletin provides guidance for Pet Transportation assistance for eligible individuals to reduce the financial burden on Soldiers and Families during a Permanent Change of Station.

5. ELIGIBILITY.

The individuals listed below are eligible for Pet Transportation assistance during PCS:

- a. Soldiers on **Active Duty** and their eligible Family Members;

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- b. **Members of the Reserve Component** of the Army (National Guard and Army Reserve **under Title 10 U.S.C**) on Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) tours;
- c. **Members of the Reserve Component** of the Army (National Guard and Army Reserve) activated with PCS Entitlements i.e. USASMA or the War College.

6. GENERAL GUIDELINES.

- a. Assistance will be provided as a Loan only up to **\$5,500**. Although this category has a \$5,500 cap, additional assistance may be requested as an exception with Unit Chain of Command and Level II concurrence.
- b. Soldier must show proof of ownership through official license and veterinarian records.
- c. Estimate of pet travel costs.
- d. CONUS pet transportation expenses as a loan and grant combination or full grant for a Service animal may be considered as an exception. The request will require a Level II recommendation and be forwarded to HQ AER for consideration and final decision to ensure consistent application of this policy across the Army. If the Soldier has a Service animal provided by the VA, a grant may be considered if the Service animal is certified from one of the three VA approved sources.
- e. If a Soldier has already paid for pet transportation fees through a credit card or high interest loan, retroactive reimbursement is authorized as a loan from 1 October 2020.
- f. Budget Planning Sheet (BPS) must be completed. A review of the completed BPS provides the AER Officer with a sense of whether there are financial management indicators that would prompt referral for financial counseling.

NOTE: The Soldier is responsible for completing all necessary steps and covering costs to ensure the pet is prepared for travel, such as health, and specific breed requirements.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES.

- a. **HQ AER Assistance Section.**
 - 1) Establish secure portal instructions for AER Officers to send and receive application information from Leaders and Soldiers.
 - 2) Receive feedback from AER Sections on any procedural improvements required.

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b. HQ AER Accounting Section.

- 1) Process ARMS ACH requests in a timely manner upon validation of signed AER Form 52, AER Check and Promissory Note in ARMS.
- 2) Provide feedback to the Assistance Section of any rejected ACH transactions and reason.

c. HQ AER Loan Management Section.

- 1) Establish repayment by allotment for cases processed through the American Red Cross.
- 2) Ensure repayment ends no later than twenty-four (24) months after repayment begins or sixty (60) days prior to ETS or end of Active Duty commitment (USAR/ARNG), whichever comes first.
- 3) Contact applicant, chain of command, and AER Officer for repayment issues (i.e. account closed, payment disputed, etc.).
- 4) Monitor and report delinquent loan payments by installation to Director, AER.
- 5) Execute collections on loans past due thirty (30) plus days.

8. PROCEDURE.

a. Routing of assistance requests.

Assistance requests received from Soldiers (**Active Duty and AGR**) will follow the existing Direct Access guidelines for assistance case processing. **If eligible for Direct Access, no COC involvement is required; if not eligible for Direct Access, COC involvement is required.**

b. Soldier or eligible Family Member with Special Power of Attorney (SPOA).

- 1) Informs Company Commander or First Sergeant as applicable IAW Paragraph 8(a) above.
- 2) Electronically forwards all required AER application information and the supporting documentation listed in Paragraph 9 below to the Unit COC for review, validation, and signature, as applicable.

NOTE: Soldiers who are eligible for Direct Access and a Spouse with SPOA should contact the local AER Section for guidance and may forward AER application information directly to the local AER Officer.

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c. **Company Commander or First Sergeant.**

- 1) Validates the financial need exists for Pet travel expenses.
- 2) Reviews Soldier Leave and Earning Statement (LES) and Spouse income sources (if applicable) when completing AER Form 57, Budget Planning Sheet (BPS) to determine the overall financial situation.
- 3) If AER assistance is required, verifies the amount(s) to meet valid financial needs.
- 4) Reviews documentation associated with Pet travel unbudgeted, unforeseen expenses.
- 5) Ensures Soldier completes AER Form 101, Application for Financial Assistance itemizing specific valid needs in Block 17.
- 6) Ensures Soldier completes AER Form 575, Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Authorization Form for ACH transactions, if applicable.
- 7) Ensures Soldier obtains a Trustee approval letter (if under bankruptcy).
- 8) Ensures Soldier obtains Special Power of Attorney (AER Form 53 or civilian equivalent) or Allotment Authorization (AER Form 55) when Soldier is not available, and Spouse is requesting assistance on the Soldier's behalf.
- 9) Contacts the nearest AER Section or other Military Aid Society (Air Force, Navy/Marine Corps or Coast Guard) within a fifty (50) mile commuting radius for application processing instructions.
- 10) Forwards AER application with supporting documentation listed in Paragraph 9 below to the nearest AER Section or other Military Aid Society Office for review, evaluation, and assistance consideration.
- 11) If outside the fifty (50) mile commuting radius of any military installation, contact the American Red Cross at 1-877-272-7337 and select Option 1 for financial assistance. The American Red Cross will provide a secure link to transmit application information listed in Paragraph 9 below, conduct case intake on behalf of AER and forward case information to HQ AER for review, evaluation, and assistance consideration/decision.

NOTE: Unit Leaders, Soldiers and Family members will ensure documents containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) are only transmitted electronically through a secure means, i.e. encrypted email, DoD Safe secure portal or other secure means. A secure link can be requested from the local AER Officer or HQ AER to securely transmit documents containing PII.

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d. AER Officers.

- 1) Receive, evaluate, and process assistance requests in accordance with these guidelines.
- 2) Ensure widest dissemination of these guidelines to Soldiers and Families near their respective Posts, Camps, or Stations.
- 3) Provide instructions on how to process AER assistance request(s) electronically in accordance with these guidelines when “face to face” interaction is restricted for AER Staff members.
- 4) When Soldiers and Leaders request a secure link, send secure DoD safe portal links to allow them to **SEND** and **RECEIVE** application data securely.
- 5) Assist Soldiers and Leaders as necessary to validate Pet Transportation expense needs.
- 6) Input the following case information in ARMS on the “**Assistance Tab**”:
 - a) Under “**Assistance Reasons**” select “**Unforeseen / Unbudgeted / Known PCS expenses.**”
 - b) On the “**Transaction Tab**” under “**Add Disbursement Itemizations and Categories**” select “**PCS Move (Active Duty Only)**” as the Disbursement Category and select “**Pet Transportation Expenses**” as the Disbursement Sub-Category.
 - c) When entering an amount that exceeds the category cap of \$5,500, select “**Exception**” as the Disbursement Category and enter “**Category Cap Exception**” as the Disbursement Sub-Category.
- 7) Verify client banking information is correct on AER Form 575 when the funds will be disbursed via ACH.

9. MANDATORY DOCUMENTS.

- a. AER FORM 101, Application for AER Assistance.
- b. AER Form 57, Budget Planning Sheet (BPS).
- c. AER Form 575, Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Authorization Form for ACH transactions, as applicable.
- d. Leave and Earning Statement (LES) and other earning statements for Soldier and/or Spouse, as applicable.

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- e. Documentation to support and validate the financial need, as required in paragraph 6 above.
- f. Trustee approval letter (if under bankruptcy).
- g. Special Power of Attorney (AER Form 53 or civilian equivalent) or Allotment Authorization (AER Form 55) when Soldier is not available.

10. This bulletin will remain in effect until rescinded by HQ AER.

11. Points of contacts for this bulletin are as follows:

- Assistance Section - SGM(R) Glen Wellman or CSM(R) Charles Durr at (571) 389-7137/ Extension #1 or via email at assistance@aerhq.org.
 - Loan Management Section - SGM(R) William Hagzan at (571) 389-7137/Extension #2 or via email at repayments-allotments@arehq.org.
12. If additional guidance is required during non-business hours, please contact an HQ AER caseworker through the Army Operations Center at (703) 697-0218.

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