

STATES OF JERSEY



INCOME SUPPORT: MILEAGE ALLOWANCE (P.62/2012) – COMMENTS

Presented to the States on 16th July 2012
by the Minister for Social Security

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

I fully support the sentiments behind this proposition of Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier, but can confirm that it is unnecessary, as the Income Support guidelines already provide for a full disregard in respect of expenses provided as a volunteer.

The relevant section of the Income Support (IS) Policy Guidelines reads as follows:

“Honorary service and volunteers

People undertaking honorary service, with a parish or charity and other volunteers may receive payments from those organisations to cover their expenses. These payments are not included as income.”

The overall treatment of volunteers can be summarised as follows:

- Genuine and reasonable volunteer expenses are completely exempt from the income support calculation, regardless of the level of those expenses.
- Working-age volunteers (i.e. aged under 65) who are receiving income support and have been identified as actively seeking work, can undertake volunteering duties as long as these do not affect the ‘actively seeking work’ activities that the individual is required to undertake in order to continue to receive benefit.
- Appropriate volunteering activity can be very helpful in assisting an unemployed person gain employment-related skills and improve confidence. However, for someone who is required to actively seek work as a condition for the receipt of Income Support, these activities should be undertaken with a view to moving into employment.

I fully support the policy of the Health and Social Services Department to encourage more people to volunteer. However, volunteering cannot be seen as a substitute for seeking paid employment. Officers from both Departments are currently working together to set out guidelines for the type and duration of volunteering activity that would be considered appropriate to be undertaken by an individual receiving Income Support and subject to ‘actively seeking work’ conditions.

Page 4 of the report accompanying P.62/2012 includes a quote from an earlier e-mail from the Social Security Department. Although it is not clear from the written report, this is an extract from a longer e-mail referring to a specific and very unusual historic situation. I can confirm that this situation will not arise again, as the policy has been clarified; and I reiterate that all mileage reimbursement payments provided in respect of voluntary work are completely disregarded when calculating income support entitlement.

In summary, the treatment of income support claimants undertaking voluntary work is completely unaffected by the success or failure of this proposition. Their genuine and reasonable expenses are fully disregarded and will continue to be fully disregarded.

For the reasons stated above, the Minister considers that the proposition is unnecessary as, even if it were adopted, there is no further action for the Minister to take. As the Minister’s current policy already makes it clear that mileage allowances are fully disregarded for income support purposes, it would not be a productive use of the time of the States to debate this matter and the Minister therefore urges the proposer to withdraw it.