



NWSEO Grieves NWS' Failure to Offer Relocation Expense Reimbursement

(June 2, 2021) On May 27, 2021, NWSEO filed a [grievance](#) over failure to provide relocation expense reimbursements for Lead Forecaster and IT Specialist vacancies in Alaska. In late April, management issued a vacancy announcement through the Merit Assignment Program (MAP) for a GS-13 Lead Forecaster position at the Alaska Aviation Weather Unit. Additionally, a month later, management issued another vacancy announcement through the MAP for a GS-13 IT Specialist position at the Alaska Region Headquarters, Systems Operation Division, IT Branch (ITB) in Anchorage, AK.

Both MAP vacancy announcements stated that relocation expenses would not be reimbursed. This is a violation of Article 39, section 1 of the NWS-NWSEO Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) which states in part that "NWS will reimburse relocation expenses in accordance with 5 USC 5724." Such MAP relocations are in the interest of the agency and not primarily for the convenience of the employee.

Additionally, this is a violation 5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)(1) Merit System Principles, and 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(4), (5), (6) and (12), Prohibited Personnel Practices. NWSEO was informed that relocation reimbursement was not offered in the announcement because management planned to select local candidates in order to avoid payment of relocation expenses. Limiting recruitment of candidates in order to avoid paying relocation expenses is a non-merit factor and constitutes a violation of merit system principles which include that recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources, solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition. The violation of this merit system principle is also a prohibited personnel practice.

As a result of Management's actions, an unknown number of qualified GS-12 bargaining unit meteorologists and IT specialists have been harmed because they have been dissuaded from applying for this promotional opportunity; and the eventual selectee has been harmed by not having his or her relocation expenses reimbursed.

The Union demanded the vacancy announcements be extended and reissued with relocation expenses authorized, and the NWS will inform all unit employees by email of this readvertisement. In addition, if a non-local candidate is selected in the interim, he or she shall be granted reimbursement of his or her relocation expenses and an additional Lead Forecaster vacancy at the Alaska Aviation Weather Unit and IT Specialist vacancy in the Alaska Region

Headquarters IT branch should be properly announced. The selectees should be granted back pay retroactive to the date of the initial selections.

NWSEO is committed to fighting for fair opportunities for our employees. We appreciate all of our members who support our organization.

-NWSEO-

No one cares more for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) employees than NOAA employees.

No one works harder for NOAA employees than NOAA employees.

We are NOAA employees. We are NWSEO.

NWSEO proudly represents more NOAA employees than any other Union. NWSEO serves bargaining unit employees of the National Weather Service, NESDIS Office of Satellite and Product Operations, Office of General Counsel, Aircraft Operations Center, and Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory.