

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	TOPIC: TRAVEL
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## TRAVEL

The following travel policies are established for use by individuals who are required to travel in-state and out-of-state on official Mississippi Department of Education government business. These policies are based on and are in addition to the guidelines established by the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA), Office of Purchasing, Travel and Fleet Management (OPTFM) in accordance with Section 25-3-41, Mississippi Code Annotated (1972). The State Travel Manual in its entirety can be found at <https://www.dfa.ms.gov/media/xxkohqdv/travel-manual-2019-resaved.pdf> policies address travel reimbursements for Mississippi Board of Education (Board) members and other non-departmental employees.

## OFFICIAL DUTY STATION

The official duty station for all employees shall be the office to which they are assigned. In extremely rare instances, an employee's official duty station shall be his or her residence if he/she is not permanently assigned to an office.

## TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION

A Travel Authorization Form must be completed in ADVANCE for all travel (in-state and out-of-state travel). For in-state travel, the highest level of approval needed is the "Division Approval." For all out-of-state travel, "Agency Approval" is needed from the Chief and State Superintendent. To ensure accurate and timely processing of direct bill payments (rental vehicles, airline tickets or hotels), send a **COPY** of the approved travel authorization form to the Office of Accounting (Accounts Payable) or to the Accounts Payable email ([accountspayable@mdek12.org](mailto:accountspayable@mdek12.org)) as soon as you receive it. The State Superintendent, State Board of Education and members of MDE Commissions are exempt from completing a Travel Authorization Form for in-state travel.

Travel advances may be requested for out-of-state trips and for prior-to-trip expenses for in-state travel such as the first night of a hotel which is due when the reservation is made. The Travel Authorization Form must be used to request the advance. Advances should be requested and submitted for processing 15 days before the travel is to occur; however, payment of the advance will not be made more than 10 days in advance.

Advances are made to cover meals, hotel expenses, taxi fares and tips. The advance should not include the cost of airline travel, conference fees or meals included as part of the conference. These items should be paid in advance by the Department.

An employee will be allowed two outstanding travel advances at a time. No additional advances will be given until the previous advances have been cleared. The travel advance must be cleared upon the employee's return. If an advance is not settled within ten (10) working days after the end of the

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TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION (continued)

month in which travel was completed, the employee's paycheck will be held or their direct deposit stopped until the debt to the state is resolved.

DFA Office of Purchasing, Travel and Fleet Management travel policy, Section 105, requires state employees to use an eWaiver Request Form to request a waiver from any standard travel procedures; however, eWaivers are not required when pricing is found for less than the state contract pricing. This form should be submitted for approval prior to making any reservations or commitments. The form should be completely filled out and signed by the entity head or designee before submitting the form to the State Travel Office. Approval of the eWaiver Request Form will depend on the State Travel Office being able to clearly determine the anticipated cost to the State and/or any anticipated savings. The eWaiver Request Form should be attached to the employee's Travel Voucher when the voucher is submitted for reimbursement. The eWaiver Request Form is provided on the Accounting website in the Travel section at [www.mdek12.org/acct/forms](http://www.mdek12.org/acct/forms).

AUTOMOBILE TRAVEL

Actual mileage shall be calculated from the official duty station or residence and back or actual miles traveled, whichever is less. The most direct route to a destination should be claimed for reimbursement purposes. The travel voucher must indicate if any intermediate stops were made. Specific sites visited must be noted on the voucher in lieu of "Vicinity Travel."

A moratorium has been placed on the use of the Trip Optimizer System beginning April 8, 2022 and ending June 30, 2024. Per House Bill 1101, it is not required to prepare and submit the trip optimizer with the travel voucher. Employees will be reimbursed for each mile traveled; however, a printout of calculation of total miles traveled 100 miles or more must still be attached to the travel voucher.

VEHICLE RENTAL

DFA has contracted with rental car companies for daily rates on car rentals originating both inside and outside the state of Mississippi. These rates are available to employees (not to contractors) when traveling out of town on Department business. Employees may rent a car from one of these automobile rental companies in lieu of traveling in their personal vehicle, when the TOS has been determined that renting is the cheapest option. Receipts will be required for the car rental, gasoline purchases, and parking fees (if the fee is in excess of \$10 per instance).

Once approval to rent is granted, the Accounting Director will provide the employee with the Mississippi corporate account number for vehicle rental. This number must be used in order to obtain the free Collision Damage Waiver/Loss Damage Waiver insurance coverage offered under the State contract. The rental car contract includes unlimited mileage and free collision insurance;

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VEHICLE RENTAL (continued)

therefore, the option to purchase insurance from vendors should be declined and will not be reimbursed.

RECEIPTS

Please refer to the specific areas within this section for details and exceptions concerning when receipts are required to be reimbursed for travel expenses. The procedures for recording and documenting expenses are also provided throughout this section. Generally, receipts are required for the following items:

- Lodging
- Transportation costs (taxis, buses, rental cars) if over \$10
- Hotel/Airport parking expenses if over \$10
- Tolls if over \$10
- Business telephone calls
- Registration fees
- Airline costs (in the few instances that the ticket is not directly charged to the agency)

TIPS

- Meals - The actual amount of tips paid up to 20% of the daily actual or allowed meal amount, whichever is less, will be reimbursed.
- Taxis/Shuttles - Tips shall not exceed 20% of the fee.
- Baggage Handling - Tips should be limited to a reasonable amount (\$2.00 per bag).

MEALS

Reimbursement for meals is authorized only when travel involves an overnight stay. Employees will be reimbursed for the actual cost of meals not to exceed DFA's authorized limit. The current authorized meal reimbursement allowances are found on DFA website in the Purchasing, Travel and Fleet Management section at [www.dfa.ms.gov](http://www.dfa.ms.gov). This site also details the meal reimbursement allowances for the designated high-cost areas. The breakfast meal will be allowed when the departure time is prior to 6:00 a.m. and overnight travel is involved. The lunch meal will be allowable when time of departure is prior to 11:00 a.m., return is after 2:00 p.m., and overnight travel is involved.

The dinner meal will be allowed while traveling when the employee returns later than 8:00 p.m. and overnight travel is involved. "Early Departure" or "Late Arrival" must be footnoted on the

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MEALS (continued)

employee’s Travel Voucher. Meal receipts are not required. In no instance will meals be reimbursable in the city in which the employee resides or uses as the official duty station.

Meal tips should be included in the actual meal expense unless the inclusion of the tips would cause the meals to exceed the maximum daily limitations placed on meals. If the daily limitation would be exceeded, the employee is allowed to record meal tips for each day under other authorized business expenses. Total meal tips shall not exceed 20% of the maximum daily meal reimbursement claimed.

Meals which are included as part of a conference registration fee shall not be reimbursable as meals on the employee’s Travel Voucher. If the employee, for whatever reason, chooses not to consume the meal at the conference, he or she shall not be entitled to any reimbursement for the cost of the meal. If special circumstances exist, for example, a food allergy prohibiting one from eating the meal provided, an exception will be made if noted by the employee and signed by the Agency Head or designee and reimbursement will be provided for that meal. Fees charged for attending the official meetings of a convention or seminar where the meeting includes an additional meal cost not included in the registration fee which causes the employee to exceed the daily maximum meal allowance will be reimbursed if supported by an itemized receipt from convention officials.

LODGING

Reimbursement for overnight lodging will be made when travel circumstances prevent departure and return travel in one day. Generally, any time an employee must travel a distance greater than 75 miles one way, he or she is eligible for overnight lodging. Since hotels charge for unkept reservations, changes in travel plans must be communicated to the hotel as soon as possible. Exceptions may be made for emergencies beyond the employee’s control. Reimbursement for lodging expenses will be made for the amount paid, when supported by a receipt. When an individual has a choice, good judgment should be exercised in selecting the lodging to avoid unreasonable charges.

General government rates should always be requested at the time the reservation is made or confirmed and again when checking into the hotel. If unacceptable motel accommodations are available at the work destination, the Mississippi Department of Education may approve travel to the nearest town where acceptable accommodations are available. If the nearest town is out-of-state, no out-of-state travel form will be required; however, approval must be obtained. An individual may elect to stay overnight with friends or relatives within a 30 to 40-mile radius of the worksite. Such lodging is not a reimbursable expense; however, travel to and from the lodging site and the work site in lieu of a motel expense shall be allowable.

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LODGING (continued)

All reimbursable expenses for lodging should be billed to the individual and not the Mississippi Department of Education. Lodging expense will not be reimbursable without a receipt, which is marked paid, showing a zero balance or accompanied by a credit card receipt. Only standard single room rates are allowable. If the individual utilizes or requires a rate other than the single occupancy rate, the hotel must certify the current rate for a single unit on the paid receipt. If two or more individuals share a motel room, separate invoices should be obtained which reports each individual's pro-rata share of the room costs. If the individual chooses to extend his or her stay for pleasure, he or she must note the leisure dates and hotel rate not authorized as official state business on the paid receipt. Lodging within the city of the individual's official place of residence is not an authorized expense.

All reservations should be guaranteed by credit card at the time they are made, especially if air travel is involved. If the room was not guaranteed and the employee arrives late to find his or her room unavailable, the Department shall not be responsible for reimbursing the employee for a higher room rate. If the employee chooses to return without accomplishing the travel objectives, the Department reserves the right to withhold all reimbursements associated with the trip.

TRAVEL IN STATE-OWNED VEHICLES

The offices of Career and Technical Education, Schools for the Blind and Deaf, School of the Arts, and the Mail Room have state-owned vehicles which may be utilized when employees of these offices are required to travel. When it is apparent that repairs, tires, or batteries are needed, the operator must initiate a request to the appropriate director for this service. The Bureau Director or above will approve a request and submit it to Accounting for authorization, with the exception of an extreme emergency. All other repairs or purchases are not permitted without prior written approval. Under no circumstance shall repairs or purchases be made without prior approval.

When a state-owned vehicle is utilized, it should always be returned in the same condition as it was prior to travel. The gas tank should be filled, and the interior should be free from all trash.

As are the buildings of the Department, these state-owned vehicles are smoke-free environments.

State-owned vehicles will not be routinely used for transportation to and from private residences and the office (this does not apply to drivers who have commuting approval from DFA). If the employee must travel any earlier than he or she would normally be leaving for work, it will be permissible for the state vehicle to be driven home that night. This would also apply if the employee returns from his or her travel after the close of business.

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## TRAVEL VOUCHERS

All Travel Vouchers should be prepared in ink or typed and should be delivered to the employees' immediate supervisor. The Travel Voucher must be reviewed for accuracy and compliance with state law and Department policy by a designated employee of the office and must be approved for payment by a supervisor of the employee. A duplicate of the approved voucher shall be submitted to Accounting along with the approved original Travel Voucher; the original receipts shall be attached to the original voucher and duplicate receipts with the duplicate voucher. A blank copy of the Travel Voucher and Travel Voucher Checklist are provided on the Accounting website in the Travel section at [www.mdek12.org/acct/forms](http://www.mdek12.org/acct/forms).

Travel vouchers must be submitted to Accounting within 10 days following the end of the travel. Monthly travel vouchers must be submitted to Accounting within 10 days following the end of the month of the travel. If the travel vouchers are not submitted within the 10 days' timeframe, they may be rejected and not processed.

Only actual expenses shall be claimed on the Travel Voucher. Any claims above actual expenditures constitute fraud. In addition, any claim for reimbursement of an expense when the expense was actually paid by another constitutes fraud. Please refer to the Discipline Policy (Section 10.0) for actions which will be taken when fraud of this nature occurs.

The first page of the travel voucher must show the traveler's name as it appears in the payroll system, the employee's PID, dates of travel, provide a summary of the charges contained on the second and subsequent pages, and provide the account distribution for charging the trip. The MAGIC Internal Order should be reflected as part of the account distribution if the travel is to be charged to an Internal Order.

Second page of the travel voucher must show the points of travel and actual destinations. If abbreviations are used, a key chart should accompany the travel voucher to show exact travel locations.

The travel voucher must be signed by the traveler, verifier, and approver (Supervisor or above).

### **Responsibility of the Travel Verifier/Program Office**

The individual signing as the Verifier must perform a review of all documentation for correctness, completion, coding, and funds availability.

### **Responsibility of the Accounting Office**

The Office of Accounting is responsible for verifying that State and Department procedures were followed; ensuring advances are settled within the required timeframe; solving issues that arise when

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TRAVEL VOUCHERS (continued)

budget errors occur; making corrections; and providing assistance to travelers when needed.

OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL

Travel Agent

Whenever an employee travels by airplane or other public carrier, travel arrangements may be handled by a travel agency, except when attending a conference (see Conference Travel). An approved travel authorization form must be submitted to the travel agency prior to making arrangements. The travel agency will not book/issue any tickets without receiving the travel authorization form signed by the State Superintendent. The confirmation from the travel agency must be attached to the Travel Voucher for a reimbursement to be made.

Should an employee desire to rent a vehicle, refer to the Vehicle Rental section. Rental cars for out of state travel must be pre-approved by the Division Chief.

Conference Travel

If the employee is attending a conference which has reserved a block of rooms for its attendees, the employee may make his or her own reservations utilizing the information supplied by the conference. If the conference has negotiated airfare rates, the employee may contact the travel agency and provide the airfare rates and other pertinent information. An approved travel authorization form signed by the State Superintendent must be submitted to the travel agency prior to making arrangements. The travel agent will make the airline reservations utilizing the data to obtain the same rate. The conference brochure detailing the room rates must accompany the employee's Travel Voucher for DFA to provide reimbursement.

Travel by Public Carrier

All travel arrangements for out-of-state travel on a public carrier may be made through a travel agency. An approved travel authorization form must be submitted to the travel agency prior to booking a flight. The travel agency will not book/issue any tickets without receiving the travel authorization form signed by the State Superintendent.

The travel agency will charge the Department's business travel account (BTA) and invoice the Department on a monthly basis. When completing the Travel Voucher, airline, bus, or train travel costs should not be included on the voucher. The Department will be invoiced by the BTA for these fares.

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Travel by taxicab, bus, shuttle, etc. should be indicated as a part of "Other Authorized Expense" on the Travel Voucher.

For all flights which are not booked through one of the contract travel agencies, the Department must maintain in its files a cost comparison showing a minimum of two (2) fares. This cost comparison must show the fare and any issuance cost and must show a savings, and shall be submitted along with the employee's Travel Voucher. Neither of these quotes should be through a travel agency if they will not be used.

#### Airline Penalty Fares

DFA has adopted the policy that, if possible, airline penalty fares shall be utilized when needed. The DFA Office of Fiscal Management will honor requisitions for warrants in payment of penalties or administrative fees when business circumstances require that schedules be changed or canceled. Such tickets are non-transferable. Although the ticket is issued in the employee's name, the ticket belongs to the State.

Most carriers require that changes be made and re-ticketed on or before the departure date of each ticketed flight. An employee may be able to exchange the return portion for a fee. The carriers may also charge a fee for customers who are on standby for an alternate flight on their ticketed day of departure. Check with the airline or the travel agent for more information. A receipt for any fees charged should be attached to the Travel Voucher for reimbursement.

To obtain the lowest possible penalty fare, airline travel should be booked as far in advance as possible.

Where the employee is required to go a day early to qualify for a low-priced penalty airfare, the State will pay the additional lodging and meal expenses not to exceed the amount of savings in the airfare.

Reimbursement for travel in private vehicles is governed by guidelines established by DFA. Reimbursement will not exceed the lowest unrestricted air fare or contract air fare. For the purpose of determining reimbursable driving expenses in lieu of air travel cost for out-of-state travel, the following driving expenses will be included:

- En route meals
- En route lodging
- Mileage cost

The total cost of these items will be compared to the cost of the lowest unrestricted air fare plus the cost of all required ground transportation at the destination point. The employee will then compare these two totals and request reimbursement for the lesser of the two.



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OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL (continued)

Should the comparison result in the reimbursement request being for the driving expenses, expense vouchers must include a written statement SPECIFICALLY making the following statement:

“It is less expensive for \_\_\_\_\_ (employee name) to use his/her private vehicle for travel on \_\_\_\_\_ (dates) from \_\_\_\_\_ (origin) to \_\_\_\_\_ (destination).”

If this comparison results in the reimbursement request being for the air travel cost, the following statement must accompany the travel request:

“The request for travel reimbursement is based on “flying total cost,” which is the lesser of “driving total cost” and “flying total cost.”

In each of these cases, an itemized listing of expenses for the comparison is to accompany the travel reimbursement request.

When two or more employees travel in one private vehicle, only one travel expense at the authorized reimbursement rate per mile shall be allowed.

Travel in State-Owned Vehicles or Airplanes

All requests to utilize a plane from the State Aircraft Pool or private charter must have prior written approval by the State Superintendent or his designee. To request a state-owned automobile for out-of-state travel, the procedures in the In-State Travel section apply.

Out-of-state travel expenses shall be recorded on the out-of-state portion of the Travel Voucher. The original voucher must include all original receipts, the request for out-of-state Travel Authorization form, the travel advance request when appropriate, and the yellow copy of the travel agency’s itinerary. A duplicate voucher and duplicate documentation must also be submitted with the original.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Prior Approval and Travel Advances

Travel outside the continental limits of the United States, (Canada, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Mexico are outside) requires prior approval from DFA. The employee should complete a Travel

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INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL (continued)

Authorization form for approval of international travel. See the Travel section on the Accounting website at [www.mdek12.org/acct/forms](http://www.mdek12.org/acct/forms). for a copy of the Travel Authorization form. The form must include all Department approvals. The Bureau Director or above, and the State Superintendent sign the Travel Authorization form for international travel. The Travel Authorization form requesting approval for international travel must be submitted to DFA at least 15 days before the trip.

The Travel Authorization form has a space for the employee to request an advance; noting the amount requested on this form will suffice for the employee to receive an advance for international travel.

DFA will return the approval form indicating if the international travel is approved or denied. This form is required for recording travel expenses and receiving reimbursement.

Travel Arrangements

All travel arrangements, including airline tickets, lodging, and rental car services, may be made through a travel agency. An approved travel authorization form must be submitted to the travel agency prior to booking a flight. The travel agency will not book/issue any tickets without receiving the travel authorization form signed by the State Superintendent. The travel agency will assist the employee in obtaining passports and visas when they are needed. In addition, the travel agency will inform the employee if any immunizations are required. It is not necessary to contact the travel agency for any changes in travel arrangements required either voluntarily or involuntarily after departure from the continental United States. If the change results in additional costs, a letter of justification must accompany the Travel Voucher.

All international travel expenses should be recorded on the out-of-state portion of the Travel Voucher.

The Travel Voucher should be completed as detailed in the Out-of-State Travel section above and submitted when the employee returns from the international trip. In addition, the actual expenses must be recorded on the original Request for Approval of International Travel form. If the expenditures exceeded the estimated cost, reimbursement for the additional cost will not occur until supplemental approval is granted from all officials approving the original travel agent. In order to obtain supplemental approval, a letter of justification must accompany the Travel Voucher and the completed Request for Approval of International Travel form.

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### CONFERENCE AND CONSULTANT/CONTRACT TRAVEL

Individuals who are contract employees of the Department may be authorized to receive travel reimbursement from departmental funds. This type of authorization may be granted to enable the members of the Board to travel on departmental business, a consultant or contract worker hired by the Department to travel while performing services, or to allow school district employees to attend a pre-approved conference. Often special conditions apply to this type of travel. The mileage, hotel, meals, and other travel expenses may be reimbursed at special (lower) rates.

The allowable reimbursable rates will depend on the arrangement made by the office hosting the conference or authorizing the travel. If no special rate is arranged by the office, the approved department rates will apply. Payments for consultant travel are charged to the budget category Contractual Services, not the Travel category.

In order for a non-departmental employee to receive reimbursement, the following must occur:

- The individual must receive written authorization for travel from the Bureau Director or above, and all special rates and considerations for travel must be noted in the letter.
- The Travel Voucher and a copy of the written authorization for travel must be submitted to the authorizing office for verification.
- Once the office has verified the Travel Voucher(s), a Consultant Services Authorization form must be prepared.
- Effective March 1, 2020, all consultant travel must include meal receipts to be reimbursed for allowable meals.
- The Travel Voucher, approved Consultative Authorization form, and all supporting documentation (including the authorization letter) should be submitted to Accounting for payment.

See the Travel section on the Accounting website at [www.mdek12.org/acct/forms](http://www.mdek12.org/acct/forms) for a copy of the Consultant Travel forms.

### TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

#### Other Expenses

Other actual expenses which will be reimbursed include parking fees, taxi fares, rental car

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TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT (continued)

charges, gasoline for rental cars, and toll road charges. Certain expenditures of this nature require that the receipt be submitted with the Travel Voucher.

Charges for transportation, such as buses, taxis, etc. shall be allowed while traveling on official business. Taxicab charges shall be allowed at the point of origin from an office to the air terminal or from the air terminal to the office. Charges shall be allowed from the air terminal. These expenses must be coded as other travel cost on the Travel Voucher.

Parking expenses incurred for airports and hotels are reimbursable when supported by a receipt, if over \$10. Business telephone calls require a receipt for reimbursement to occur. If the telephone charge is reflected on the hotel bill, no other receipt will be necessary. The charge must be circled, and the nature of the call must be indicated. Personal calls are not reimbursable expenses.

Registration fees for conferences, seminars, etc. are allowable expenses. Whenever possible, the employee should pre-register and have the Department prepay the expense. If the Department does not prepay the fees, the employee may be reimbursed for the expense provided he or she has prior approval and a receipt accompanies the Travel Voucher. Tips for meals will be reimbursable provided they do not exceed 20% of the allowable daily rate or actual meal cost, whichever is less. Tips which do not exceed 20% of the claimed expenditure are allowed for out-of-state ground transportation. Baggage carriers may also be tipped when they assist the employee with his or her luggage. For additional information on tips, refer to page 6.

Necessary travel expenses do not include personal expense items such as entertainment, liquor charges, telephone calls to family members, and trip insurance.

VENDOR BENEFITS FOR TRAVELERS

Several companies offer benefits to frequent travelers. These benefits, which are normally awarded on a point system, include free or reduced airplane tickets or hotel rooms. Any bonus or promotional gratuity received as a result of official state travel shall be used to offset or reduce the cost of subsequent official state travel. Under no circumstances can the traveler keep a bonus or other promotional gratuity, so earned, for his own personal use. As sufficient points are accumulated, resulting from state-paid travel, free ticket coupons will be applied for by travelers and used to offset official state travel costs. Follow airline procedures to exchange the miles for a ticket. The Department may utilize points earned by one employee for another employee who will be traveling. There is no prohibition on earning the points and participating in any of the programs offered by these companies providing these guidelines are followed.

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### ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES

An employee traveling on behalf of the Department who is involved in an accident while traveling on the job, whether in their own vehicle or in any other vehicle and whether or not they are operating the vehicle, must report the accident and their involvement to the Human Resources Director and the Bureau Director or above within one (1) working day after the accident, unless they are incapacitated. Should they be incapacitated, they should make a report as soon as they are able to notify the appropriate Department management. Furthermore, the employee operating the vehicle shall be responsible for completing the motor vehicle accident report or other such report to ensure that the accident is reported to the proper law enforcement agency. Any employee having any knowledge of a job-related incident that could result in a legal action against an employee of the Department or the Department shall immediately report the incident to the Bureau Director or above. The Bureau Director or above shall notify the Human Resources Director. Failure of an employee to follow this policy could result in disciplinary action by the Department.

Should an employee be involved in an accident while on state business which may or may not implicate a state vehicle, the following steps should be followed:

- Dial 911 for assistance, including an ambulance, if anyone is injured.
- Immediately notify the city police, sheriff's office, or highway patrol.
- Do not move either vehicle until one of the above officers of the law advises you to do so.
- Exchange the name, address, license number, auto tag number, and name of insurance company with the other party.
- The Proof of Insurance number that should be entered on the police report is 11-46-15 (if in a state-owned vehicle).
- Do not make any statement of guilt to any party.
- Notify the Bureau Director or above of the accident within one (1) working day and submit a copy of the accident form. The Bureau Director or above will contact the office which has authority over the vehicle (if in a state-owned vehicle).
- Notify your insurance agent as soon as possible.
- The Department will have three (3) estimates of repair on the state-owned vehicle and will have the authorization obtained in order for repairs to be made.
- If the other party is definitely at fault, the Department will make every effort to have that party's insurance company pay for the repair to the state-owned vehicle. Keep your supervisor informed during all phases of the process.