

Updates to 5 CFR Part 591, Subpart A – Uniform Allowances

I. Purpose and Scope

This attachment summarizes the regulatory changes and unchanged provisions under [5 CFR part 591, subpart A](#), as amended by OPM’s Uniform Allowances final rule, [published April 14, 2026](#), with an effective date of July 13, 2026. The effective date was confirmed by a second Federal Register Notice, [published June 26, 2026](#). OPM’s uniform allowance regulations apply to Federal civilian employees in an “Executive agency” as defined in [5 U.S.C. 105](#). Some agencies may possess separate statutory or appropriations authorities for uniforms and should review the final rule to determine applicability and whether any action is required.

II. What Has Changed

A. Revised Purpose and Prescribing Authority (§ 591.101)

The purpose section has been revised to reflect the full statutory basis for OPM’s authority and to expressly state that the subpart covers both agencies that pay a uniform allowance to their employees and agencies that furnish or purchase uniforms for employees.

B. Definition of “Uniform” (§ 591.102)

The definition of “uniform” has been revised to clarify what are allowable uniform items and excluded items under the authority. The revised definition makes clear that a uniform is a specified article or articles of clothing or other items required by an agency to be worn by an employee to provide a distinctive and easily identifiable appearance in performing his or her job. Examples include hats, shirts, slacks, skirts, neckties, outerwear, name pins or tags, flag pins, rank insignias or cords, or patches.

“Uniform” does not include:

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) required to be worn for an employee’s safety;
- Normal business or work attire when an employee is not required to wear his or her uniform;
- Tools, communication devices, or other equipment required in the performance of an employee’s job duties;

- Personal items worn at the discretion of the employee (for example, jewelry or undergarments);
- Any items worn based solely on a reasonable accommodation; or
- Services such as cleaning, tailoring, and alterations.

C. Distinction Between a Uniform vs. PPE

The rule draws a clear distinction between what is a uniform versus PPE. Generally, uniforms are appearance-based while PPE are safety-based. Uniform allowance funds must not be used to purchase PPE. The procurement of personal protective clothing and PPE are governed separately under [5 U.S.C. 7903](#), applicable agency safety standards, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements. PPE examples include ballistic-resistant vests, safety helmets, face shields, and footwear worn solely for safety purposes that agencies should treat as PPE rather than as uniform items.

D. Maximum Uniform Allowance Rate (§ 591.103)

The Governmentwide maximum annual uniform allowance and the maximum annual cost for furnishing uniforms increased from \$800 to \$1,500. This is the first Governmentwide increase since 2007 and is supported by inflation, agency-reported cost data, and OPM's market analysis.

Although agencies are authorized to pay up to \$1,500, agencies are not required to pay the maximum to every employee and should determine rates based on actual uniform needs. Agencies may continue to set lower rates based on actual uniform needs and available funds. (Agencies may also establish higher initial annual maximum rates under certain conditions. See [5 CFR 591.104](#).)

E. Vendor Service Charge Limitation (§ 591.103(b))

When an agency purchases uniforms directly from a vendor on behalf of one or more employees, the agency may include as part of the annual maximum uniform allowance up to 4 percent of related vendor assessed service charges, including but not limited to shipping and handling, credit card processing fees, and other administrative or transaction based service fees. The combined amount of the uniform cost and the included service charges may not exceed the employee's applicable annual maximum furnished uniform allowance rate. This authority is derived from 5 U.S.C. 5901(a).

F. Program Administration (§ 591.105)

The rule will require any agency that provides a uniform allowance or furnishes uniforms under 5 CFR part 591, subpart A, to establish policies sufficient to ensure compliance with 5 U.S.C. 5901 and this subpart. This provision codifies existing expectations and practices while clarifying express coverage for agencies that furnish uniforms.

III. What Has Not Changed

A. Statutory Framework

The underlying statutory framework remains in 5 U.S.C. chapter 59, subchapter I. OPM retains authority to adjust the maximum annual uniform allowance rate by regulation and to prescribe regulations as necessary to administer the subchapter.

B. Purpose of the Allowance

The allowance continues to defray, but not necessarily cover in full, the cost of required uniforms.

C. Agency Discretion

Agencies retain discretion, within applicable statute and regulation, to determine allowance levels up to the \$1,500 annual maximum and to establish uniform standards and related administrative procedures.

D. Furnishing Uniforms vs. Paying an Allowance — Agency Determination Required

Agencies may continue to furnish uniforms directly, pay a uniform allowance, or use a combination of both methods. The agency head or designee should determine that the relevant category or group of employees is required to wear a uniform before appropriated funds are used for uniform allowance purposes. When uniforms are furnished, they generally remain Government property and may be subject to return requirements.

E. Higher Initial Maximum Uniform Allowance Rate Authority (§ 591.104)

The authority for agencies to establish a higher initial maximum uniform allowance rate above \$1,500 remains unchanged under [5 CFR 591.104](#). The head of an agency may establish one or more initial maximum rates greater than the Governmentwide maximum, subject to the notice-and-comment requirements in that section.

F. Uniform Allowance Funds Are Not “Wages”

The treatment of a uniform allowance or furnished uniform under 5 U.S.C. 5901(c) remains unchanged. Any uniform allowance funds paid or uniforms furnished directly to employees are not “wages” for Social Security or Federal employment tax/wage withholding purposes—that is, not “wages” under the Social Security Act's definition, the Federal Insurance Contributions Act, or the Federal wage withholding rules.

G. Allowance Increases Cannot be Provided Retroactively

The rule does not establish an entitlement to a higher, or any, uniform allowance payment retroactively. Agencies are not permitted to provide retroactive uniform allowance payments to correct administrative errors, delays, or failure to update allowance rates.

IV. Key Takeaways

What Has Changed

This rule increases the maximum annual uniform allowance to \$1,500, clarifies the definition of a uniform, makes the PPE distinction explicit, addresses an agency’s authority to pay a uniform supplier’s service charges, and extends express written-policy coverage to furnished-uniform programs.

What Has Not Changed

At the same time, the underlying statutory framework, agency discretion within law, higher-initial-rate authority, and foundational agency-determination requirements remain unchanged.