

Uniform Allowance Final Regulations: Frequently Asked Questions

At a Glance

| Topic | Summary |
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| Effective date of the 5 CFR part 591, subpart A final rule | The effective date of the 5 CFR part 591, subpart A final rule is July 13, 2026. Until that date, the current regulations must be applied. |
| Maximum annual allowance | The Governmentwide maximum annual uniform allowance and maximum annual cost for furnishing uniforms increases to \$1,500 per employee. |
| Agency discretion | Agencies are not required to pay the full \$1,500; rates should reflect actual uniform needs, estimated costs, and available funds. |
| Definition of uniform | A uniform is a required article or articles of clothing or other required items that provide a distinctive and easily identifiable appearance while performing the job. |
| Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) | Uniform allowance funds must not be used to purchase personal protective equipment. PPE is governed separately by safety and protective-clothing authorities. |
| Program policies | Agencies that pay allowances or furnish uniforms under 5 CFR part 591, subpart A, must have policies sufficient to ensure compliance. |

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a uniform allowance?

A uniform allowance is an amount an agency may pay to an employee, or the value of uniforms an agency may furnish, when the employee is required to wear a uniform while performing official duties. The allowance is intended to help defray uniform costs; it is not necessarily intended to cover every cost an employee may incur.

2. What is changing under the final uniform allowance regulations?

The final regulations clarify the definition of a uniform, distinguish uniforms from personal protective equipment (PPE), increase the Governmentwide maximum annual uniform

allowance from \$800 to \$1,500, clarify vendor service charge rules, and require agency policies sufficient to ensure compliance for allowance and furnished-uniform programs.

3. When do the changes become effective?

The changes are based on OPM revising the uniform allowance regulations at 5 CFR part 591, subpart A, with revisions becoming effective July 13, 2026.

4. Who is covered by 5 CFR part 591, subpart A?

The regulations apply to Federal civilian employees in an Executive agency as defined in [5 U.S.C. 105](#). Some agencies may have separate statutory or appropriations authorities for uniforms or uniform allowances and should review their applicable authority before applying the title 5 uniform allowance rules.

5. What counts as a uniform?

A uniform is a specified article or articles of clothing or other required items that an agency requires an employee to wear to provide a distinctive and easily identifiable appearance in performing the job, as defined in [5 CFR 591.102](#). Examples may include hats, shirts, slacks, skirts, neckties, outerwear, name pins or tags, flag pins, rank insignias or cords, and patches.

6. What are examples of allowable uniform items?

- Required shirts, blouses, slacks, skirts, dresses, trousers, shorts, sweaters, vests, neckties, or scarves.
- Required hats, caps, visors, seasonal outerwear, or appearance-based shoes or boots that are part of a distinctive and identifiable uniform.
- Required identification or appearance items such as name pins or tags, rank insignia, patches, cords, hat bands, tie clips, or flag pins.
- Required specialized clothing such as lab coats, scrubs, station uniforms worn by firefighters, or kitchen apparel when prescribed as the employee's uniform.

7. What items are not covered as uniforms?

- PPE required for safety.
- Normal business or work attire when the employee is not required to wear a prescribed uniform.
- Tools, communication devices, or other equipment used to perform job duties.
- Personal items worn at the employee's discretion, such as jewelry or ordinary undergarments.
- Items worn solely as a reasonable accommodation.
- Services such as cleaning, tailoring, alterations, laundering, or dry cleaning.

8. What are examples of PPE?

Examples of PPE include ballistic-resistant vests, safety helmets, face shields, respirators, safety glasses, protection worn by firefighters during fire operations, and footwear required solely for safety under a published safety standard. These items are governed by [5 U.S.C. 7903](#), [29 U.S.C. 668](#), [29 CFR part 1960](#), and [29 CFR part 1910, subpart I](#).

9. Can an agency use uniform allowance funds to buy PPE?

No. Uniform allowance funds must not be used to purchase PPE. PPE is safety based and is governed separately under authorities such as [5 U.S.C. 7903](#), [29 U.S.C. 668](#), and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations. OPM's final regulations explain that items such as ballistic resistant vests, safety helmets, face shields, and safety only footwear are PPE that must not be purchased with funds intended for uniforms. Agencies should correct any past practices that combine PPE purchases with uniform funds.

10. What is the new maximum annual uniform allowance under the final regulations?

Effective July 13, 2026, the maximum uniform allowance will increase to \$1,500 per employee under [5 CFR part 591, subpart A](#), as amended by OPM's final regulations. (Note: Prior to July 13, 2026, the Governmentwide maximum annual uniform allowance remains \$800 per employee, and agencies must continue to apply the current \$800 maximum until the new \$1,500 maximum takes effect.)

11. Must every employee who wears a uniform receive \$1,500?

No. Agencies may set lower rates and are not required to pay the maximum amount to every covered employee. Agencies should determine rates based on actual uniform needs and estimated costs for each category of employees, consistent with [5 U.S.C. 5901](#) and [5 CFR part 591, subpart A](#). The uniform allowance authority is intended to defray required uniform expenses and not to fully cover every cost. Even within the same occupation, employees may fall into different categories based on duty station and prescribed uniform requirements. As a result, maximum allowance rates or actual uniform costs can vary.

12. Can an agency establish a higher initial maximum uniform allowance rate?

Yes. Under [5 CFR 591.104](#), an agency head may establish one or more initial maximum uniform allowance rates above the Governmentwide maximum when the minimum basic uniform for a category of employees has an unusually high initial cost. The agency must publish a Federal Register notice describing the affected category, the minimum basic uniform, estimated costs, and the proposed higher initial maximum.

13. May an agency furnish uniforms instead of paying a cash allowance?

Yes. An agency may furnish uniforms directly, pay a uniform allowance, or use a combination of both methods under [5 U.S.C. 5901](#) and [5 CFR part 591, subpart A](#). When

uniforms are furnished directly, the items generally remain Government property and may be subject to agency return requirements when no longer needed for official duty. Agencies that furnish uniforms directly should address property management, return, and reuse in their written policies under [5 CFR 591.105](#).

14. What are vendor service charges, and can agencies pay them?

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. (See [5 U.S.C. 5901\(a\)](#) and [5 CFR 591.103\(b\)](#).)

15. Is a uniform allowance treated as wages or basic pay?

No. Uniform allowances paid to employees, and uniforms furnished directly to employees, are not wages for Social Security or Federal employment tax and wage-withholding purposes under [5 U.S.C. 5901\(c\)](#). Uniform allowances are also not part of an employee's rate of basic pay for any purpose and are not used to compute other payments or benefits, and they are not subject to the aggregate limitation on pay under [5 U.S.C. 5307\(a\)\(2\)\(C\)](#).

16. Are agencies now required to establish policies to administer the uniform allowance authority?

Yes. An agency that provides a uniform allowance or furnishes uniforms under [5 CFR part 591, subpart A](#) must establish policies sufficient to ensure compliance with [5 U.S.C. 5901](#) and the regulations in [5 CFR 591.105](#).