

§ 2715. Procedures regarding major disasters and incidents abroad affecting United States citizens

(a) Authority

In the case of a major disaster or incident abroad which affects the health and safety of citizens of the United States residing or traveling abroad, the Secretary of State shall provide prompt and thorough notification of all appropriate information concerning such disaster or incident and its effect on United States citizens to the next-of-kin of such individuals. Notification shall be provided through the most expeditious means available, including telephone communications, and shall include timely written notice. The Secretary, through the appropriate offices of the Department of State, shall act as a clearinghouse for up-to-date information for the next-of-kin and shall provide other services and assistance. Assistance shall include liaison with foreign governments and persons and with United States air carriers concerning arrangements for the preparation and transport to the United States of the remains of citizens who die abroad, as well as disposition of personal estates pursuant to section 2715c of this title.

(b) Definitions

For purposes of this section and sections 2715b and 2715c of this title, the term “consular officer” includes any United States citizen employee of the Department of State who is designated by the Secretary of State to perform consular services pursuant to such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe.

(Aug. 1, 1956, ch. 841, title I, § 43, as added Pub. L. 101-246, title I, § 115(c)(2), Feb. 16, 1990, 104 Stat. 23; amended Pub. L. 106-113, div. B, § 1000(a)(7) [div. A, title II, § 235], Nov. 29, 1999, 113 Stat. 1536, 1501A-429.)

Editorial Notes

PRIOR PROVISIONS

A prior section 43 of act Aug. 1, 1956, was renumbered section 44 by section 115(c)(1) of Pub. L. 101-246, and subsequently renumbered, and set out as a Short Title of 1956 Amendment note under section 2651 of this title, prior to repeal by Pub. L. 102-138, title I, § 111(1), Oct. 28, 1991, 105 Stat. 654.

AMENDMENTS

1999—Pub. L. 106-113 designated existing provisions as subsec. (a), inserted subsec. heading, substituted “disposition of personal estates pursuant to section 2715c of this title” for “disposition of personal effects”, and added subsec. (b).

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDIZED PROCEDURES

Pub. L. 101-246, title I, § 115(d), Feb. 16, 1990, 104 Stat. 23, provided that:

“(1) The Secretary of State shall enter into discussions with international air carriers and other appropriate entities to develop standardized procedures which will assist the Secretary in implementing the provisions of section 43 of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956, as amended by subsection (c) [22 U.S.C. 2715].

“(2) The Secretary of State shall consider the feasibility of establishing a toll-free telephone number to

facilitate inquiries by the next-of-kin in cases of major disasters or incidents abroad which affect the health and safety of citizens of the United States residing or traveling abroad.”

§ 2715a. Provision of information on certain violent crimes abroad to victims and victims’ families

(a) Sense of Congress

It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) it is in the national interests of the United States to provide information regarding the killing, abduction, torture, or other serious mistreatment of United States citizens abroad to the victims of such crimes, or the families of victims of such crimes if they are United States citizens; and

(2) the provision of such information is sufficiently important that the discharge of the responsibility for identifying and disseminating such information should be vested in a cabinet-level officer of the United States Government.

(b) Responsibility

The Secretary of State shall take appropriate actions to ensure that the United States Government takes all appropriate actions to—

(1) identify promptly information (including classified information) in the possession of the departments and agencies of the United States Government regarding the killing, abduction, torture, or other serious mistreatment of United States citizens abroad; and

(2) subject to subsection (c), promptly make such information available to—

(A) the victims of such crimes; or

(B) when appropriate, the family members of the victims of such crimes if such family members are United States citizens.

(c) Limitations

The Secretary shall work with the heads of appropriate departments and agencies of the United States Government in order to ensure that information relevant to a crime covered by subsection (b) is promptly reviewed and, to the maximum extent practicable, without jeopardizing sensitive sources and methods or other vital national security interests, or without jeopardizing an on-going criminal investigation or proceeding, made available under that subsection unless such disclosure is specifically prohibited by law.

(Pub. L. 105-107, title III, § 307, Nov. 20, 1997, 111 Stat. 2252.)

§ 2715b. Notification of next of kin; reports of death

(a) In general

Whenever a United States citizen or national dies abroad, a consular officer shall endeavor to notify, or assist the Secretary of State in notifying, the next of kin or legal guardian as soon as possible, except that, in the case of death of any Peace Corps volunteer (within the meaning of section 2504(a) of this title), any member of the Armed Forces, any dependent of such a volunteer or member, or any Department of Defense employee, the consular officer shall assist

the Peace Corps or the appropriate military authorities, as the case may be, in making such notifications.

(b) Reports of death or presumptive death

The consular officer may, for any United States citizen who dies abroad—

(1) in the case of a finding of death by the appropriate local authorities, issue a report of death or of presumptive death; or

(2) in the absence of a finding of death by the appropriate local authorities, issue a report of presumptive death.

(c) Implementing regulations

The Secretary of State shall prescribe such regulations as may be necessary to carry out this section.

(Aug. 1, 1956, ch. 841, title I, § 43A, as added Pub. L. 106-113, div. B, § 1000(a)(7) [div. A, title II, § 234(b)], Nov. 29, 1999, 113 Stat. 1536, 1501A-426.)

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE

Pub. L. 106-113, div. B, § 1000(a)(7) [div. A, title II, § 234(c)], Nov. 29, 1999, 113 Stat. 1536, 1501A-429, provided that: “The repeal and amendment made by this section [enacting this section and section 2715c of this title and repealing section 4195 of this title] shall take effect six months after the date of enactment of this Act [Nov. 29, 1999].”

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE IN ARRANGEMENTS FOLLOWING DEATH OF UNITED STATES CITIZEN ABROAD

Pub. L. 95-426, title I, § 121, Oct. 7, 1978, 92 Stat. 970, as amended by Pub. L. 97-241, title V, § 505(a)(2), (b)(1), Aug. 24, 1982, 96 Stat. 299, provided that: “The Congress finds that the Department of State should, in the performance of its consular duties, render all reasonable administrative assistance to a United States citizen who is making necessary arrangements following the death of another United States citizen abroad.”

§ 2715c. Conservation and disposition of estates

(a) Conservation of estates abroad

(1) Authority to act as conservator

Whenever a United States citizen or national dies abroad, a consular officer shall act as the provisional conservator of the portion of the decedent's estate located abroad and, subject to paragraphs (3), (4), and (5), shall—

(A) take possession of the personal effects of the decedent within his jurisdiction;

(B) inventory and appraise the personal effects of the decedent, sign the inventory, and annex thereto a certificate as to the accuracy of the inventory and appraised value of each article;

(C) when appropriate in the exercise of prudent administration, collect the debts due to the decedent in the officer's jurisdiction and pay from the estate the obligations owed by the decedent;

(D) sell or dispose of, as appropriate, in the exercise of prudent administration, all perishable items of property;

(E) sell, after reasonable public notice and notice to such next of kin as can be ascertained with reasonable diligence, such additional items of property as necessary to provide funds sufficient to pay the decedent's

debts and property taxes in the country of death, funeral expenses, and other expenses incident to the disposition of the estate;

(F) upon the expiration of the one-year period beginning on the date of death (or after such additional period as may be required for final settlement of the estate), if no claimant shall have appeared, after reasonable public notice and notice to such next of kin as can be ascertained with reasonable diligence, sell or dispose of the residue of the personal estate, except as provided in subparagraph (G), in the same manner as United States Government-owned foreign excess property;

(G) transmit to the custody of the Secretary of State in Washington, D.C. the proceeds of any sales, together with all financial instruments (including bonds, shares of stock, and notes of indebtedness), jewelry, heirlooms, and other articles of obvious sentimental value, to be held in trust for the legal claimant; and

(H) in the event that the decedent's estate includes an interest in real property located within the jurisdiction of the officer and such interest does not devolve by the applicable laws of intestate succession or otherwise, provide for title to the property to be conveyed to the Government of the United States unless the Secretary declines to accept such conveyance.

(2) Authority to act as administrator

Subject to paragraphs (3) and (4), a consular officer may act as administrator of an estate in exceptional circumstances if expressly authorized to do so by the Secretary of State.

(3) Exceptions

The responsibilities described in paragraphs (1) and (2) may not be performed to the extent that the decedent has left or there is otherwise appointed, in the country where the death occurred or where the decedent was domiciled, a legal representative, partner in trade, or trustee appointed to take care of his personal estate. If the decedent's legal representative shall appear at any time prior to transmission of the estate to the Secretary and demand the proceeds and effects being held by the consular officer, the officer shall deliver them to the representative after having collected any prescribed fee for the services performed under this section.

(4) Additional requirement

In addition to being subject to the limitations in paragraph (3), the responsibilities described in paragraphs (1) and (2) may not be performed unless—

(A) authorized by treaty provisions or permitted by the laws or authorities of the country wherein the death occurs, or the decedent is domiciled; or

(B) permitted by established usage in that country.

(5) Statutory construction

Nothing in this section supersedes or otherwise affects the authority of any military