



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS



In the matter of:)
)
) ISCR Case: 19-02376
)
Applicant for Security Clearance)

Appearances

For Government: Daniel F. Crowley, Esquire, Department Counsel
For Applicant: *Pro se*

July 16, 2020

Decision

CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

Statement of Case

On June 5, 2018, Applicant submitted a security clearance application (SF-86). On January 10, 2020, the Department of Defense Consolidated Adjudications Facility (DoD CAF) issued Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR), detailing security concerns under Guideline F, Financial Considerations. (Item 1.) The action was taken under Executive Order (EO) 10865, *Safeguarding Classified Information within Industry* (February 20, 1960), as amended; DoD Directive 5220.6, *Defense Industrial Personnel Security Clearance Review Program* (January 2, 1992), as amended (Directive); and the *National Security Adjudicative Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Access to Classified Information or Eligibility to Hold a Sensitive Position* (AG), effective June 8, 2017.

Applicant answered the SOR on February 13, 2020. She admitted all of the SOR allegations concerning her delinquent debts; except for subparagraphs 1.b., 1.c. and 1.i., and requested that her case be decided by an administrative judge on the written record without a hearing. (Item 2.) On March 31, 2020, Department Counsel submitted

the Government's written case. A complete copy of the File of Relevant Material (FORM), containing six Items, was mailed to Applicant on April 6, 2020, and received by her on May 4, 2020. The FORM notified Applicant that she had an opportunity to file objections and submit material in refutation, extenuation, or mitigation within 30 days of her receipt of the FORM.

Applicant responded to the FORM on May 30, 2020. She made no objection to the Government's exhibits. Applicant also submitted additional information in her FORM response, to which Department Counsel had no objection. DOHA assigned the case to me on July 7, 2020. Items 1 through 6 are admitted into evidence. Applicant's response to the FORM (Response) is also admitted.

Findings of Fact

Guideline F – Financial Considerations

Applicant is 53 years old. She is married, and has a 21 year old son by a previous marriage. (Item 3 at pages 7, 26~27 and 30.) As Department Counsel correctly notes, Applicant attributes her financial difficulties to a 2011 divorce, two periods of unemployment: from May 2014~March 2015 and again from January 2018~May 2018, the death of her former spouse in 2013 thus ending child support, and the death of her brother in 2017. (FORM at page 2.)

1.a. Applicant admits that she is indebted to Creditor A as the result of an automobile repossession, but disputes the \$12,500 amount. In support of her dispute she offers a February 2020 credit report with a pen and ink notation: "offer settlement for 5K," and nothing more. (Response at page 18.) Without more, this does not establish a good-faith effort to address this rather significant debt. This allegation is found against Applicant.

1.b and 1.c. Applicant denies that she is indebted to Creditor B for past-due debts totaling about \$1,326. As these debts do not appear on Applicant's 2020 credit reports (Response), these allegations are found for Applicant.

1.d.~1.k. Applicant admits that she was indebted to the U.S. Department of Education as the result of eight college loans totaling about \$16,138. In her Response, Applicant submitted documentation showing she is now in good standing vis-à-vis the student loans. (Response at pages 2~3, and 8~12.) These allegations are found for Applicant.

1.l. Applicant denies that she is indebted to Creditor L for an alleged \$244 past-due debt. As this debt does not appear on Applicants 2020 credit reports (Response), this allegation is found for Applicant.

Policies

When evaluating an applicant's suitability for national security eligibility, the administrative judge must consider the adjudicative guidelines. In addition to brief introductory explanations for each guideline, the adjudicative guidelines (AG) list potentially disqualifying conditions and mitigating conditions, which are to be used in evaluating an applicant's national security eligibility.

These guidelines are not inflexible rules of law. Instead, recognizing the complexities of human behavior, these guidelines are applied in conjunction with the factors listed in AG ¶ 2 describing the adjudicative process. The administrative judge's overarching adjudicative goal is a fair, impartial, and commonsense decision. The entire process is a conscientious scrutiny of applicable guidelines in the context of a number of variables known as the whole-person concept. The administrative judge must consider all available, reliable information about the person, past and present, favorable and unfavorable, in making a decision.

The protection of the national security is the paramount consideration. AG ¶ 2(b) requires that "[a]ny doubt concerning personnel being considered for national security eligibility will be resolved in favor of the national security." In reaching this decision, I have drawn only those conclusions that are reasonable, logical, and based on the evidence contained in the record. I have not drawn inferences based on mere speculation or conjecture.

Directive ¶ E3.1.14, requires the Government to present evidence to establish controverted facts alleged in the SOR. Under Directive ¶ E3.1.15, an "applicant is responsible for presenting witnesses and other evidence to rebut, explain, extenuate, or mitigate facts admitted by the applicant or proven by Department Counsel, and has the ultimate burden of persuasion as to obtaining a favorable clearance decision."

A person applying for national security eligibility seeks to enter into a fiduciary relationship with the Government predicated upon trust and confidence. This relationship transcends normal duty hours and endures throughout off-duty hours. The Government reposes a high degree of trust and confidence in individuals to whom it grants national security eligibility. Decisions include, by necessity, consideration of the possible risk the applicant may deliberately or inadvertently fail to protect or safeguard classified information. Such decisions entail a certain degree of legally permissible extrapolation as to potential, rather than actual, risk of compromise of classified or sensitive information. Finally, as emphasized in Section 7 of EO 10865, "[a]ny determination under this order adverse to an applicant shall be a determination in terms of the national interest and shall in no sense be a determination as to the loyalty of the applicant concerned." See *also* EO 12968, Section 3.1(b) (listing multiple prerequisites for access to classified or sensitive information.)

Analysis

Guideline F - Financial Considerations

The security concerns relating to the guideline for financial considerations are set out in AG ¶ 18, which reads in pertinent part:

Failure to live within one's means, satisfy debts, and meet financial obligations may indicate poor self-control, lack of judgment, or unwillingness to abide by rules and regulations, all of which can raise questions about an individual's reliability, trustworthiness, and ability to protect classified or sensitive information. Financial distress can also be caused or exacerbated by, and thus can be a possible indicator of, other issues of personnel security concern such as excessive gambling, mental health conditions, substance misuse, or alcohol abuse or dependence. An individual who is financially overextended is at greater risk of having to engage in illegal or otherwise questionable acts to generate funds. . . .

AG ¶ 19 describes three conditions that could raise security concerns and may be disqualifying in this case:

- (a) inability to satisfy debts;
- (b) unwillingness to satisfy debts regardless of the ability to do so; and
- (c) a history of not meeting financial obligations.

Applicant has significant past-due indebtedness. These facts establish prima facie support for the foregoing disqualifying conditions, and shift the burden to Applicant to mitigate those concerns.

The guideline includes five conditions in AG ¶ 20 that could mitigate the security concerns arising from Applicant's alleged financial difficulties:

- (a) the behavior happened so long ago, was so infrequent, or occurred under such circumstances that it is unlikely to recur and does not cast doubt on the individual's current reliability, trustworthiness, or good judgment;
- (b) the conditions that resulted in the financial problem were largely beyond the person's control (e.g., loss of employment, a business downturn, unexpected medical emergency, a death, divorce or separation, clear victimization by predatory lending practices, or identity theft), and the individual acted responsibly under the circumstances;

(c) the individual has received or is receiving financial counseling for the problem from a legitimate and credible source, such as a non-profit credit counseling service, and there are clear indications that the problem is being resolved or is under control;

(d) the individual initiated and is adhering to a good-faith effort to repay overdue creditors or otherwise resolve debts; and

(e) the individual has a reasonable basis to dispute the legitimacy of the past-due debt which is the cause of the problem and provides documented proof to substantiate the basis of the dispute or provides evidence of actions to resolve the issue.

Although Applicant had unforeseen circumstances that were beyond her control; other than her bare averments, she has yet to address her significant, past-due automobile debt. The record does not establish mitigation of financial security concerns under the provisions of AG ¶ 20.

Whole-Person Concept

Under the whole-person concept, the administrative judge must evaluate an applicant's eligibility for a security clearance by considering the totality of the applicant's conduct and all relevant circumstances. The administrative judge should consider the nine adjudicative process factors listed at AG ¶ 2(d):

(1) the nature, extent, and seriousness of the conduct; (2) the circumstances surrounding the conduct, to include knowledgeable participation; (3) the frequency and recency of the conduct; (4) the individual's age and maturity at the time of the conduct; (5) the extent to which participation is voluntary; (6) the presence or absence of rehabilitation and other permanent behavioral changes; (7) the motivation for the conduct; (8) the potential for pressure, coercion, exploitation, or duress; and (9) the likelihood of continuation or recurrence.

According to AG ¶ 2(c), the ultimate determination of whether to grant national security eligibility must be an overall commonsense judgment based upon careful consideration of the applicable guidelines and the whole-person concept.

I considered the potentially disqualifying and mitigating conditions in light of all pertinent facts and circumstances surrounding this case. Overall, the record evidence leaves me with questions and doubts as to Applicant's judgment, eligibility, and suitability for a security clearance. She has not met her burden to mitigate the security concerns arising under the guideline for financial considerations. Once she can demonstrate she has addressed her automobile loan default; and has no other past-due

indebtedness, Applicant may again be eligible for a security clearance; sometime in the future, but not now.

Formal Findings

Formal findings for or against Applicant on the allegations set forth in the SOR, as required by ¶ E3.1.25 of Enclosure 3 of the Directive, are:

Paragraph 1, Guideline F:	AGAINST APPLICANT
Subparagraph 1.a.:	Against Applicant
Subparagraphs 1.b through 1.l.:	For Applicant

Conclusion

In light of all of the circumstances presented by the record in this case, it is not clearly consistent with the national interest to grant Applicant national security eligibility and a security clearance. National security eligibility is denied.

Richard A. Cefola
Administrative Judge