



**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS**



In the matter of:)
)
) ISCR Case No. 23-01785
)
)
Applicant for Security Clearance)

Appearances

For Government: Jeff Nagel, Esq., Department Counsel
For Applicant: *Pro se*

08/08/2024

Decision

CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

Statement of the Case

On December 19, 2023, in accordance with DoD Directive 5220.6, as amended (Directive), the Department of Defense issued Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR) alleging facts that raise security concerns under Guideline F (Financial Considerations). The SOR further informed Applicant that, based on information available to the government, DoD adjudicators could not make the preliminary affirmative finding it is clearly consistent with the national interest to grant or continue Applicant's security clearance.

Applicant answered the SOR on December 22, 2023, and requested a hearing before an administrative judge. (Answer.) The case was assigned to me on April 10, 2024. The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) issued a notice of hearing on April 25, 2024, scheduling the hearing for May 16, 2024. The hearing was convened as scheduled. The Government offered Exhibits (GXs) 1 through 7, which were admitted into evidence. Applicant testified on his own behalf and called a co-worker to testify. The record was left open until June 14, 2024, for receipt of additional

documentation. On May 30, 2024, Applicant offered four documents, which I marked Applicant's Exhibits (AppXs) 1~4, and admitted into evidence. AppX 1 is a letter of recommendation from his former commanding officer. DOHA received the transcript of the hearing (TR) on May 24, 2024.

Findings of Fact

Applicant admitted all the allegations in the SOR. After a thorough and careful review of the pleadings, exhibits, and testimony, I make the following findings of fact.

Applicant is a 52-year-old employee of a defense contractor. He has been employed with the defense contractor since November of 2023. He is divorced and has four children. Applicant served in the Marine Corps for 22 years, was a Gunnery Sergeant, and "an Intelligence Analyst." He was deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan. (TR at page 15 line 7 to page 17 line 23.) Applicant attributes his financial difficulties to putting the needs of his family first, and those of his creditors second. However, with his new position with a defense contractor, he is now earning sufficient income to address his past-due indebtedness. (TR at page 17 line 24 to page 23 line 24.)

Guideline F - Financial Considerations

All three debts, that are of concern to the Government, are to the same credit union.

1.a. Applicant has "an installment plan of 98 biweekly payments of \$160.00 each," towards the \$15,716 past-due debt owed to the credit union. This is evidenced by correspondence from the credit union. (TR at page 24 lines 1~20, at page 23 line 15 to page 26 line 1, and AppX 2 at page 1.)

1.b. Applicant has "an installment plan of 97 biweekly payments of \$47.50 each," towards the \$4,619 past-due debt owed to the credit union. This is evidenced by correspondence from the credit union. (TR at page 26 line 22 to page 27 line 19, and AppX 2 at page 2.)

1.c. Applicant has "an installment plan of 99 biweekly payments of \$177.50 each," towards the \$17,734 past-due debt owed to the credit union. This is evidenced by correspondence from the credit union. (TR at page 27 line 20 to page 28 line 14, and AppX 2 at page 3.)

Policies

When evaluating an applicant's national security eligibility, the administrative judge must consider the adjudicative guidelines (AG). In addition to brief introductory explanations for each guideline, the adjudicative guidelines 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, administrative judges apply the guidelines 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. According to AG ¶ 2(a), the entire process is a conscientious scrutiny 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.

Under Directive ¶ E3.1.14, the Government must present evidence to establish controverted facts alleged in the SOR. Directive ¶ E3.1.15 states the "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 who applies for access to classified information 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 access to classified information. 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 information.

Section 7 of Executive Order (EO) 10865 provides that adverse decisions shall be "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 concern relating to the guideline for Financial Considerations is set out in AG ¶ 18:

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. Affluence that cannot be explained by known sources of income is also a security concern insofar as it may result from criminal activity, including espionage.

The guideline notes several conditions that could raise security concerns under AG ¶ 19. Two are potentially applicable in this case:

- (a) inability to satisfy debts; and
- (c) a history of not meeting financial obligations.

Applicant has past-due debts totaling about \$38,000 to his credit union. The evidence is sufficient to raise these disqualifying conditions.

AG ¶ 20 provides conditions that could mitigate security concerns. I considered all of the mitigating conditions under AG ¶ 20 including:

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

Applicant has set up installment payment plans, by which he is making biweekly payments totaling \$385, towards his three past-due debts to his credit union. He has stable employment and earns sufficient income to continue adhering to his mutually agreed repayment plan with his creditor. By so doing, Applicant has demonstrated that future financial problems are unlikely. Mitigation under AG ¶ 20 has been established. Financial Considerations is found for Applicant.

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.

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

I considered the potentially disqualifying and mitigating conditions in light of all facts and circumstances surrounding this case. I have incorporated my comments under Guideline F in my whole-person analysis. Some of the factors in AG ¶ 2(d) were addressed under those guidelines, but some warrant additional comment. Applicant had a distinguished history of serving in the U.S. Marine Corps. Overall, the record evidence leaves me without questions or doubts as to Applicant's eligibility and suitability for a security clearance. For all these reasons, I conclude Applicant mitigated the Financial Considerations security concerns.

Formal Findings

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

Paragraph 1, Guideline F:	FOR APPLICANT
Subparagraphs 1.a.~1.c:	For Applicant

Conclusion

In light of all of the circumstances presented by the record in this case, it is clearly consistent with the national interest to grant or continue Applicant national security eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Richard A. Cefola
Administrative Judge