



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



In the matter of:)
)
) ISCR Case No. 24-01001
)
)
Applicant for Security Clearance)

Appearances

For Government: Andrew Henderson, Esquire, Department Counsel
For Applicant: Samir Nakhleh, Esquire, Applicant's Counsel

02/25/2025

Decision

CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

On October 18, 2023, Applicant submitted his Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). On September 17, 2024, the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency Consolidated Adjudication Services (DCSA CAS) issued Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR) detailing security concerns under Guideline H. The action was taken under Executive Order 10865, *Safeguarding Classified Information within Industry* (February 20, 1960), as amended; Department of Defense Directive 5220.6, *Defense Industrial Personnel Security Clearance Review Program* (January 2, 1992), as amended (Directive); and the Adjudicative Guidelines effective June 8, 2017.

Applicant answered the SOR in writing on October 22, 2024, and requested a hearing before an administrative judge. Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) received the request on December 18, 2024. I received the case assignment on December 18, 2024. DOHA issued a Notice of Hearing on January 15, 2025, and I convened the hearing as scheduled on February 12, 2025. The Government offered

Exhibits (GXs) 1 and 2, which were received without objection. Applicant testified and submitted Exhibits (AppXs) A through T, without objection. DOHA received the transcript of the hearing (TR) on February 24, 2025. Based upon a review of the pleadings, exhibits, and testimony, eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Findings of Fact

In his Answer to the SOR Applicant admitted the factual allegations in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the SOR. Applicant is 43 years old, unmarried, and has no children. He has a degree in electrical engineering. He works for a defense contractor. (TR at page 11 line 12 to page 19 line 22.)

Guideline H – Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse

1.a. Applicant admits using marijuana 1~3 times on weekends, or about 1,000~3,000 times, over a period of about 20 years, from May 2005 until February of 2024. He started working for his current employer in September 2023, filed out his e-QIP in October of 2023, but continued using marijuana on weekends for an additional four months, about 16~48 times. (TR at page 21 line 16 to page 22 line 4, at page 22 lines 16 to page 25 line 18, at page 29 line 22 to page 30 line 4, at page 34 line 21 to page 38 line 19, and GX 1 at page 29.) Applicant has signed a statement of intent to abstain from future drug involvement. (AppX A.)

1.b. Applicant admits purchasing marijuana, once a month, or about 144 times, over a period of about 12 years, from 2012 until February of 2024. (TR at page 22 lines 5~15, and at page 39 lines 6~14.)

Policies

When evaluating an applicant's suitability for a security clearance, 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 useful in evaluating an applicant's eligibility for access to classified information.

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. Likewise, I have avoided drawing inferences grounded on mere speculation or conjecture.

Under Directive ¶ E3.1.14, the Government must 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 who seeks access to classified information enters 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 10865 provides that 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 H - Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse

The security concern relating to the guideline for Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse is set forth at AG ¶ 24:

The illegal use of controlled substances, to include the misuse of prescription and non-prescription drugs, and the use of other substances that cause physical or mental impairment or are used in a manner inconsistent with their intended purpose can raise questions about an individual's reliability and trustworthiness, both because such behavior may lead to physical or psychological impairment and because it raises questions about a person's ability or willingness to comply with laws, rules, and regulations. *Controlled substance* means any "controlled substance" as defined in 21 U.S.C. 802. *Substance misuse* is the generic term adopted in this guideline to describe any of the behaviors listed above.

The guideline at AG ¶ 25 contains seven conditions that could raise a security concern and may be disqualifying. Two conditions are established:

- (a) any substance misuse (see above definition); and
- (c) illegal possession of a controlled substance, including cultivation, processing, manufacture, purchase, sale, or distribution; or possession of drug paraphernalia.

Appellant smoked marijuana thousands of times, and purchased it over a hundred times. Therefore, AG ¶ 25 (a) and (c) are established.

The guideline at AG ¶ 26 contains four conditions that could mitigate security concerns. Two conditions may be applicable:

- (a) the behavior happened so long ago, was so infrequent, or happened under such circumstances that it is unlikely to recur or does not cast doubt on the individual's current reliability, trustworthiness, or good judgment; and
- (b) the individual acknowledges his or her drug involvement and substance misuse, provides evidence of actions taken to overcome this problem, and has established a pattern of abstinence, including, but not limited to:
 - (1) disassociation from drug-using associates and contacts;
 - (2) changing or avoiding the environment where drugs were used; and
 - (3) providing a signed statement of intent to abstain from all drug involvement and substance misuse, acknowledging that any future involvement or misuse is grounds for revocation of national security eligibility.

Although Applicant has signed a letter of intent against future drug involvement, his usage and purchases of marijuana are too voluminous and too recent to be mitigated. Since only about one year has passed since his last use and purchase of marijuana, he has not established a sufficient track record of abstinence to find that this behavior will not recur or to say it is not a security concern. Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse is found against 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 an applicant's conduct and all the 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.

AG ¶ 2(b) requires each case must be judged on its own merits. 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 the facts and circumstances surrounding this case. Applicant is respected in the workplace, and in his community. (AppXs A and L.) However, overall, the record evidence leaves me with questions and doubts as to Applicant's eligibility and suitability for a security clearance. For all these reasons, I conclude Applicant failed to mitigate the security concerns arising from his drug involvement and substance abuse.

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 H:	AGAINST APPLICANT
Subparagraphs 1.a. and 1.b:	Against 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 for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Richard A. Cefola
Administrative Judge