



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



In the matter of:)
)
) ISCR Case No. 24-02258
)
Applicant for Security Clearance)

Appearances

For Government: Erin Thompson, Esq., Department Counsel
For Applicant: *Pro se*

02/17/2026

Decision

CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

Applicant did not mitigate the security concerns under Guidelines H (Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse) and E (Personal Conduct). Eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Statement of the Case

On February 7, 2025, the Department of Defense (DOD) issued a Statement of Reasons (SOR) to Applicant detailing security concerns under Guidelines H and E. Applicant responded to the SOR on March 25, 2025, and requested a decision based on the written record in lieu of a hearing.

The Government’s written case was submitted on July 22, 2025. A complete copy of the file of relevant material (FORM) was provided to Applicant, who was afforded an opportunity to file objections and submit material to refute, extenuate, or mitigate the security concerns. Applicant received the FORM on August 19, 2025. Applicant elected not to respond to the Government’s FORM. The period for his response lapsed on September 19, 2025. The case was assigned to me on December 23, 2025. The Government exhibits included in the FORM are admitted in evidence without objection.

Findings of Fact

Applicant is a 56-year-old employee of a defense contractor. He served in the U.S. Army from 1986 until 2012 and retired honorably. He earned a bachelor's degree from Columbia Southern University in 2011. He is married and has two teenage children who reside with him. Applicant was first granted a security clearance when he joined the Army in 1988. (Item 3)

In his Answer, Applicant admitted having purchased and used marijuana from about July 2020 to about November 2023. He also admitted to purchasing and using marijuana while having a security clearance and holding a sensitive position, during that same time period. Appellant admitted to testing positive for marijuana on a urinalysis exam, conducted in July of 2023, as part of the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency's (DCSA) Drug-Free Workplace. Applicant further admitted that he was terminated from his position as an Investigator with DCSA in January 2024 as a result of violating DCSA's Drug-Free Workplace Program. Applicant stated he suffers from PTSD, anxiety, and depression and used marijuana in an effort to help with these conditions. (Items 3 and 4)

Policies

This case is adjudicated 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 adjudicative guidelines (AG), which became effective on June 8, 2017.

When evaluating an applicant's suitability for a security clearance, the administrative judge must consider the adjudicative guidelines. 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 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 the adjudicative process. The administrative judge's overarching adjudicative goal is a fair, impartial, and commonsense decision. According to AG ¶ 2(c), 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."

Under Directive ¶ E3.1.14, the Government must present evidence to establish controverted facts alleged in the SOR. Under Directive ¶ E3.1.15, 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.” The applicant has the ultimate burden of persuasion to obtain a favorable security 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 safeguard classified information. Such decisions entail a certain degree of legally permissible extrapolation of potential, rather than actual, risk of compromise of classified information.

Section 7 of 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 H, Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse

The security concern for drug involvement and substance misuse is set out in 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 notes several conditions that could raise security concerns under AG ¶ 25. The following are potentially applicable in this case:

- (a) any substance misuse (see above definition);
- (b) testing positive for an illegal drug;

(c) illegal possession of a controlled substance, including cultivation, processing, manufacture, purchase, sale, or distribution; or possession of drug paraphernalia; and

(f) any illegal drug use while granted access to classified information or holding a sensitive position;

On October 25, 2014, the Director of National Intelligence (the Security Executive Agent (SecEA)) issued DNI Memorandum ES 2014-00674, "*Adherence to Federal Laws Prohibiting Marijuana Use*," which states:

[C]hanges to state laws and the laws of the District of Columbia pertaining to marijuana use do not alter the existing National Security Adjudicative Guidelines An individual's disregard of federal law pertaining to the use, sale, or manufacture of marijuana remains adjudicatively relevant in national security determinations. As always, adjudicative authorities are expected to evaluate claimed or developed use of, or involvement with, marijuana using the current adjudicative criteria. The adjudicative authority must determine if the use of, or involvement with, marijuana raises questions about the individual's judgment, reliability, trustworthiness, and willingness to comply with law, rules, and regulations, including federal laws, when making eligibility decisions of persons proposed for, or occupying, sensitive national security positions.

On December 21, 2021, the SecEA promulgated clarifying guidance concerning marijuana-related issues in security clearance adjudications. It states in pertinent part:

[Federal] agencies are instructed that prior recreational marijuana use by an individual may be relevant to adjudications but not determinative. The SecEA has provided direction in [the adjudicative guidelines] to agencies that requires them to use a "whole-person concept." This requires adjudicators to carefully weigh a number of variables in an individual's life to determine whether that individual's behavior raises a security concern, if at all, and whether that concern has been mitigated such that the individual may now receive a favorable adjudicative determination. Relevant mitigations include, but are not limited to, frequency of use and whether the individual can demonstrate that future use is unlikely to recur, including by signing an attestation or other such appropriate mitigation. Additionally, in light of the long-standing federal law and policy prohibiting illegal drug use while occupying a sensitive position or holding a security clearance, agencies are encouraged to advise prospective national security workforce employees that they should refrain from any future marijuana use upon initiation of the national security vetting process, which commences once the individual signs the certification contained in the Standard Form 86 (SF-86), Questionnaire for National Security Positions.

Applicant admitted having purchased and used marijuana from about July 2020 to about November 2023. He also admitted to using marijuana while having a security clearance and holding a sensitive position. Appellant admitted to testing positive for marijuana on a urinalysis test administered in July of 2023. AG ¶¶ 25(a), (b), (c) and (f) are applicable.

AG ¶ 26 provides conditions that could mitigate security concerns. The following are potentially 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.

There is no evidence of any marijuana purchase or use after November 2023. These are all positive steps. However, Applicant purchased and used marijuana over a number of years to include while having a security clearance and holding a sensitive position. There is no "bright-line" rule for when conduct is recent. 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." With additional time without illegal drug use, Applicant may warrant a security clearance. I am not convinced that he is there yet. None of the mitigating conditions are sufficiently applicable to overcome concerns about Applicant's drug use, reliability, trustworthiness, and judgment.

Guideline E: Personal Conduct

The security concern for personal conduct is set out in AG ¶ 15, as follows:

Conduct involving questionable judgment, lack of candor, dishonesty, or unwillingness to comply with rules and regulations can raise questions about an individual's reliability, trustworthiness, and ability to protect classified or sensitive information. Of special interest is any failure to cooperate or provide truthful and candid answers during national security clearance investigative or adjudicative processes.

AG ¶ 16 describes conditions that could raise a security concern and may be disqualifying. The following disqualifying conditions are potentially applicable:

(c) credible adverse information in several adjudicative issue areas that is not sufficient for an adverse determination under any other single guideline, but which, when considered as a whole, supports a whole-person assessment of questionable judgment, untrustworthiness, unreliability, lack of candor, unwillingness to comply with rules and regulations, or other characteristics indicating that the individual may not properly safeguard classified or sensitive information.

The SOR cross-alleged the drug involvement allegations under the personal conduct guideline. That conduct reflects questionable judgment and an unwillingness to comply with rules and regulations. AG ¶ 16(c) is applicable.

AG ¶ 17 provides conditions that could mitigate security concerns. The following are potentially applicable:

(c) the offense is so minor, or so much time has passed, or the behavior is so infrequent, or it happened under such unique circumstances that it is unlikely to recur and does not cast doubt on the individual's reliability, trustworthiness, or good judgment; and

(e) the individual has taken positive steps to reduce or eliminate vulnerability to exploitation, manipulation, or duress.

Appellant purchased and used marijuana in violation of federal law and security clearance regulations and DCSA's drug-free workplace program. His personal conduct is not mitigated and continues to cast doubt on his current reliability, trustworthiness, and good judgment. None of the mitigating conditions, individually or collectively, are sufficiently applicable to overcome Appellant's use of marijuana and the circumstances surrounding his use.

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.”

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 the facts and circumstances surrounding this case. I have incorporated my comments under Guidelines H and E in my whole-person analysis. I also considered Appellant’s military service and educational background.

Overall, the record evidence leaves me with questions and doubts about Applicant’s eligibility and suitability for a security clearance. I conclude Applicant did not mitigate the security concern under Guidelines H and E.

Formal Findings

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

Paragraph 1, Guideline H:	Against Applicant
Subparagraph 1.a -1. d:	Against Applicant
Paragraph 2, Guideline E:	Against Applicant
Subparagraph 1.a and 1.b:	Against Applicant

Conclusion

It is not clearly consistent with the national interest to grant Applicant eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Richard A. Cefola
Administrative Judge