



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



In the matter of:)	
)	
)	ISCR Case No. 25-00467
)	
Applicant for Security Clearance)	

Appearances

For Government:
Lauren Shure, Esquire, Department Counsel

For Applicant:
Pro se

01/20/2026

Decision

CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

On June 5, 2023, Applicant submitted his Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). On July 2, 2025, the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency Consolidated Adjudication Services (DCSA CAS) issued Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR) detailing security concerns under Guideline H (Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse). 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 (Answer) in writing on July 28, 2025, with an attached Statement of Intent, and requested a hearing before an administrative judge. The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) received the request on September 9, 2025. I received the case assignment on September 9, 2025. DOHA issued a Notice of Hearing on September 9, 2025, setting this hearing for October 28, 2025. However, due to a lapse in Federal funding, all Administrative Judges were furloughed from October 1 through November 12, 2025. This hearing was thus cancelled, rescheduled for December 9, 2025, and convened as rescheduled. The Government offered Exhibits (GXs) 1 through 3, which were received into evidence without objection. Applicant testified, called one witness to testify, and asked that the record be kept open until January 9, 2026, for the receipt of additional documentation. On January 8, 2026, Applicant submitted Applicant Exhibit (AppX) and a closing statement, which were received into evidence without objection. DOHA received the transcript of the hearing (TR) on December 19, 2025. Based upon a review of the pleadings, exhibits, and testimony, eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Findings of Fact

In his Answer to the SOR Applicant admitted the factual allegations in Subparagraph 1.a. of the SOR; but denied the factual allegations Subparagraph 1.b. of the SOR, with explanations. He also provided additional information, a Statement of Intent, to support his request for eligibility for a security clearance.

Applicant is 29 years old, unmarried, and has no children. He has a master's degree in electrical engineering. He has worked for a defense contractor since June 2021. (TR at page 5 line 10 to page 6 line 4, at page 21 line 15 to page 23 line 17, and GX 1 at pages 5 and 11.)

Guideline H – Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse

1.a. and 1.b. The use and purchase of marijuana is legal in the state where Applicant resides. (It has been legal there since 2012.) He used marijuana about once every two months from October of 2015 until his last usage in January of 2025, about a year ago. Applicant also purchased marijuana from dispensaries from about 2018 until October of 2023, more than two years ago. After receipt of the SOR, Applicant signed a "Statement of Intent," eschewing any future drug usage. (TR at page 23 line 18 to page 38 line 9, and Answer at page 6.)

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. One condition is arguably established:

(a) any substance misuse (see above definition).

Appellant used marijuana about six times a year from October 2015 until January 2025. He also purchased the drug from 2018 to until 2023. However, it is important to note that marijuana's use and purchases were legal in the state where Applicant resides, since 2012. Therefore, AG ¶ 25 (a) is arguably 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.

Applicant's involvement with marijuana is legal in the state where he resides. However, now understanding that it is illegal under Federal law; and applying for a security clearance for the first time, he has ceased his involvement with the drug. Applicant has also signed a Statement of Intent to that end. Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse 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 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 as testified to by his mentor. Applicant's Manager also averred to his value in the workplace. (TR at page 13 line 13 to page 20 line 12, and AppX A.)

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 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: FOR APPLICANT

Subparagraphs 1.a. and 1.b: 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 Applicant national security eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Richard A. Cefola
Administrative Judge