



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



In the matter of:

Applicant for Security Clearance

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ISCR Case No. 14-05094

Appearances

For Government: Gregg A. Cervi, Esquire, Department Counsel

For Applicant: *Pro se*

September 19, 2016

DECISION

ROSS, Wilford H., Administrative Judge:

Applicant submitted his Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP), on February 9, 2014. (Item 3.) On December 9, 2014, the Department of Defense issued a Statement of Reasons (SOR) detailing the security concerns under Guideline F (Financial Considerations) concerning Applicant. (Item 1.) 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 (AG) effective within the Department of Defense on September 1, 2006.

Applicant answered the SOR in writing on September 28, 2015, and requested a decision by an administrative judge without a hearing. (Item 2.) Department Counsel submitted the Government's written case (FORM) to Applicant on November 16, 2015.¹

¹Department Counsel submitted six items in the FORM. Item 6 is inadmissible and will not be considered or cited as evidence in this case. It is the summary of an unsworn interview of Applicant conducted by an interviewer from the Office of Personnel Management on March 7, 2014. The summary was never adopted by Applicant as his own statement, or otherwise certified by him to be accurate. Under Executive Order 10865

Applicant acknowledged receipt of the FORM on November 19, 2015. He was given 30 days from receipt of the FORM to submit any additional documentation. Applicant did not submit any additional information within that time. The case was assigned to me on February 19, 2016. Based upon a review of the pleadings and exhibits, eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Findings of Fact

Applicant is 50, and divorced since 2005. He has two children. He is employed by a defense contractor and seeks to obtain a security clearance in connection with his employment.

Paragraph 1 (Guideline F, Financial Considerations)

The Government alleges in this paragraph that Applicant is ineligible for clearance because he is financially overextended and therefore potentially unreliable, untrustworthy, or at risk of having to engage in illegal acts to generate funds. Applicant admitted allegations 1.a, 1.b, 1.c, 1.d, 1.f, 1.h, 1.i, and 1.k. Those admissions are findings of fact. He denied the remaining allegations.

The SOR lists twelve delinquent debts (SOR 1.a through 1.l). The total of the debts alleged in the SOR is approximately \$34,935. Applicant admits to approximately \$32,952 of the alleged debts. The existence and amount of all the debts is supported by Applicant's statements in Section 26 of his e-QIP (Item 3), and credit reports dated February 25, 2014; and September 16, 2014. (Items 5, 4.)

1.a. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for a past-due payment on an automobile loan in the amount of \$867. He stated in his answer that the account was current. He goes on to state, "I am the owner yet someone else is responsible for the monthly payments." (Item 2.) No further information was provided to support this statement. Applicant did not prove that this debt is resolved.

1.b. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for a past-due debt on an automobile that was repossessed in 2010 in the amount of \$17,181. No further information was provided. This debt is not resolved.

1.c. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for past-due debt on an automobile that was repossessed in the amount of \$12,246. No further information was provided. This debt is not resolved.

1.d. Applicant admitted that he owed a past-due credit card debt in the amount of \$750. No further information was provided. This debt is not resolved.

Section 5, and Directive ¶ E3.1.20, this Report of Investigation summary is inadmissible in the absence of an authenticating witness. In addition, any relevant information is cumulative with Applicant's statements in his answer (Item 2), and the information contained in Items 3 through 5.

1.e. Applicant denied owing a creditor \$600 for a past-due account, stating in his answer, "I am unaware of the debt totally." (Item 2.) Supporting information on this debt is found in both Items 3 and 4 of the FORM. As stated, Applicant elected not to respond to the FORM. This debt is not resolved.

1.f. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for a past-due account in the amount of \$580. He stated in his answer that he was "working with the outside collection agency to resolve the debt." (Item 2.) No further information was provided to support this statement. Applicant did not prove that this debt is resolved.

1.g. Applicant denied owing a creditor \$511 for a past-due account stating in his answer, "I am unaware of the debt totally." (Item 2.) Supporting information on this debt is found in both Items 4 and 5 of the FORM. As stated, Applicant elected not to respond to the FORM. This debt is not resolved.

1.h. Applicant admitted that he owed a past-due cell phone debt in the amount of \$502. No further information was provided. This debt is not resolved.

1.i. Applicant admitted that he owed a past-due debt to a creditor in the amount of \$469. He provided a copy of a letter dated July 7, 2015, which he had sent to this creditor proposing a payment arrangement. No information was provided by Applicant showing that the creditor had accepted the proposal. Applicant did not prove that this debt is resolved.

1.j. Applicant denied owing a creditor \$430 for a past-due account stating in his answer, "I am unaware of this account." (Item 2.) Supporting information on this debt is found in both Items 4 and 5 of the FORM. He also admits having an unpaid past-due debt with this creditor in Section 26 of his e-QIP. (Item 3.) As stated, Applicant elected not to respond to the FORM. This debt is not resolved.²

1.k. Applicant admitted owing a past-due debt to this creditor in the amount of \$357. He states in his answer that the debt was "paid off October 2014, shows paid in full on current credit report." (Item 2.) Applicant elected not to submit the credit report, or any other information supporting this statement. Applicant did not prove that this debt is resolved.

1.l. Applicant denied owing a creditor \$442 for a past-due account, stating in his answer, "I am unaware of this debt totally." (Item 2.) Supporting information on this debt is found in Item 5 of the FORM. He also admits having an unpaid past-due debt with this creditor in Section 26 of his e-QIP. (Item 3.) As stated, Applicant elected not to respond to the FORM. This debt is not resolved.³

²Applicant provided with his answer a copy of a letter addressed to this creditor dated July 14, 2015. (Item 2.) In that letter Applicant proposes a payment arrangement for an account with a different account number than that in this allegation and allegation 1.i., which is with the same creditor.

³See footnote 2.

Applicant has been gainfully employed by his current employer since February 2006. (Item 3, Section 13A.) Concerning the reasons for his financial issues he stated, "I fell behind with making monthly payments due to divorce and child support payments monthly." (Item 2.) However, he did not show that he had acted in any way to mitigate the financial issues for several years. In addition, he did not submit a budget, or any other information concerning his income and expenses. Applicant submitted no evidence that he has received any financial counseling. His failure to provide any documentation supporting his assertions that some of these delinquencies had been or were being resolved was pointed out by Department Counsel in the FORM, but Applicant elected not to submit anything in response. Finally, Applicant knew of the Government's concerns about his delinquent debts since February 2014, and evidently made little or no attempt to resolve the debts since then.

Applicant provided no evidence concerning the quality of his professional performance, the level of responsibility his duties entail, or his track record with respect to handling sensitive information and observation of security procedures. I was unable to evaluate his credibility, demeanor, or character in person since he elected to have his case decided without a hearing.

Policies

Security clearance decisions are not made in a vacuum. 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 to be used as appropriate 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, these guidelines are applied in conjunction with the factors listed in AG ¶ 2 describing the adjudicative process. The administrative judge's over-arching 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. In addition, the administrative judge may also rely on his or her own common sense, as well as knowledge of the law, human nature, and the ways of the world, in making a reasoned decision.

The protection of the national security is the paramount consideration. AG ¶ 2(b) requires that, "Any doubt concerning personnel being considered for access to classified information 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, “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 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. Security clearance decisions include, by necessity, consideration of the possible risk that 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.

Finally, as emphasized in Section 7 of Executive Order 10865, “Any 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

Paragraph 1 (Guideline F, Financial Considerations)

The security concern relating to the guideline for Financial Considerations is set out in AG ¶ 18:

Failure or inability 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 information. An individual who is financially overextended is at risk of having to engage in illegal acts to generate funds.

This concern is broader than the possibility that an individual might knowingly compromise sensitive information in order to raise money. It encompasses concerns about an individual's self-control, judgment, and other qualities essential to protecting sensitive information. An individual who is financially irresponsible may also be negligent, unconcerned, or irresponsible in handling and safeguarding sensitive information.⁴

⁴ See ISCR Case No. 11-05365 at 3 (App. Bd. May 1, 2012).

The guideline notes several conditions that could raise security concerns. Under AG ¶ 19(a), an “inability or unwillingness to satisfy debts” is potentially disqualifying. Similarly under AG ¶ 19(c), “a history of not meeting financial obligations” may raise security concerns. Applicant has over \$34,000 in past-due debts, which have been due and owing for several years. The evidence is sufficient to raise these potentially disqualifying conditions.

The guideline also includes examples of conditions that could mitigate security concerns arising from financial difficulties. Under AG ¶ 20(a), the disqualifying conditions may be mitigated where “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.” This condition does not apply as Applicant’s financial difficulties have been in existence for several years and continue seemingly undiminished to date.

AG ¶ 20(b) states that the disqualifying conditions may be mitigated where “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, or a death, divorce or separation), and the individual acted responsibly under the circumstances.” According to Applicant, these issues were connected to his child support payments after getting divorced in 2005. However, he did not submit any evidence to show how he tried to responsibly adjust his spending or resolve his debts over the following years.

AG ¶ 20(d) states it can be mitigating where, “the individual has initiated a good-faith effort to repay overdue creditors or otherwise resolve debts.” Applicant states in his answer (Item 2) that he is resolving some of the debts set forth in the SOR. However, despite being informed of his opportunity to submit a documentary response to the FORM, Applicant elected not to submit any documentary evidence to support the statements in Item 2.

Applicant denied allegations 1.e, 1.g, 1.j, and 1.l, stating that he had no knowledge of those debts. However, he did not provide any evidence showing that he had disputed the debts. AG ¶ 20(e) requires “documented proof to substantiate the basis of the dispute or . . . evidence of actions to resolve the issue.” Neither exists in this case. This mitigating condition does not apply.

In conclusion, looking at Applicant’s entire financial situation at the present time, I cannot find that “there are clear indications that the problem is being resolved or is under control,” as is required by AG ¶ 20(c). Paragraph 1 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 the applicant’s conduct and all the relevant circumstances. 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. The administrative judge must consider the nine adjudicative process factors listed at AG ¶ 2(a):

(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.

I considered the potentially disqualifying and mitigating conditions in light of all the relevant facts and circumstances surrounding this case. The discussion under Guideline F, above, applies here as well. Applicant has had financial problems for several years, which he has not yet resolved. If he is able to successfully resolve his debts, Applicant may be eligible for a security clearance in the future. However, at the present time, Applicant's conduct with regard to his finances was not mitigated.

Under AG ¶ 2(a)(3), his conduct is recent and continuing. I cannot find that there have been permanent behavioral changes under AG ¶ 2(a)(6). Accordingly, I also cannot find that there is little to no potential for pressure, coercion, exploitation, or duress (AG ¶ 2(a)(8)); or that there is little likelihood of continuation or recurrence (AG ¶ 2(a)(9)).

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 has not mitigated the security concerns arising from his financial situation. Accordingly, the evidence supports denying his request for a security clearance.

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

Subparagraphs 1.a through 1.g:

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 eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

WILFORD H. ROSS
Administrative Judge