



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



In the matter of:

Applicant for Security Clearance

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ISCR Case No. 15-01090

Appearances

For Government: Braden M. Murphy, Esquire, Department Counsel

For Applicant: *Pro se*

September 26, 2016

DECISION

ROSS, Wilford H., Administrative Judge:

Applicant submitted his Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP), on May 13, 2013. (Item 3.) On August 1, 2015, 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 August 24, 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 October 30, 2015.¹

¹Department Counsel submitted seven items in the FORM. Item 5 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 June 17, 2013. 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 5, 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 March 2, 2016. Based upon a review of the pleadings and exhibits, eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Findings of Fact

Applicant is 44, and married. He has one child. Applicant received a bachelor's degree in 1996. He has been employed by a defense contractor since 2009, 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 and 1.b. He admitted owing the debt in allegation 1.c, but denied it was delinquent. Those admissions are findings of fact.

The SOR lists three delinquent debts (SOR 1.a through 1.c). The total of the debts alleged in the SOR is approximately \$55,975. Applicant admitted to owing approximately \$10,954 of the alleged debts without reservation. 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 June 5, 2013; July 16, 2014; and July 15, 2015. (Items 4, 6, and 7.)

1.a. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for a past-due medical debt in the amount of \$9,586. He stated in his e-QIP that this 2007 debt was concerning, "Medical bills from recent surgery and the recent job loss of my spouse." He further stated, "Currently paying them down with installments." (Item 3 at Section 26.) No further information was provided. This debt is not resolved.

1.b. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for a past-due medical debt in the amount of \$1,359. No further information was provided. This debt is not resolved.

1.c. Applicant admitted that he was indebted for student loans in the amount of \$45,030. However, he stated in his answer (Item 2), "I admit owing the stated amount. I deny that this account remains delinquent. The status is now current and up to date, with no missed or delinquent payments." No further information was provided by Applicant. The most recent credit report in the record, dated July 15, 2015, shows at

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, 4, 6, and 7.

least one past-due student loan in the amount of \$22,067. (Item 3 at 4.) Applicant did not present sufficient evidence to show this debt is being resolved.

Applicant has been gainfully employed by his current employer since June 2009. (Item 3, Section 13A.) 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 his student loans 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 May 2013, when he filled out his e-QIP, 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.²

² 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 \$55,000 in past-due debts, which have been due and owing for several years. Even assuming that the student loans are no longer in default, he owes almost \$11,000 in past-due medical bills, dating from 2007. He stated that he was making payments on that debt, but produced no evidence to support that statement. 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, the medical bills that were incurred in 2007 could not be paid because his wife had lost her job at some unknown date. (SOR 1.a and 1.b.) 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 the student loan 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.

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.³

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

³AG ¶¶ 20(e) and 20(f) have no application to this case.

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.c:

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