



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS



In the matter of:

Applicant for Security Clearance

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ISCR Case No. 18-00970

Appearances

For Government: Tara R. Karoian, Esq., Department Counsel
For Applicant: *Pro se*

11/16/2018

Decision

COACHER, Robert E., Administrative Judge:

Applicant has not mitigated the financial considerations security concerns. Eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

Statement of the Case

On April 16, 2018, the Department of Defense Consolidated Adjudications Facility (DOD CAF) issued Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR) detailing security concerns under Guideline F. The DOD CAF acted under Executive Order (EO) 10865, *Safeguarding Classified Information within Industry* (February 20, 1960), as amended; DOD 5220.6, *Defense Industrial Personnel Security Clearance Review Program* (January 2, 1992), as amended (Directive); and the adjudicative guidelines effective June 8, 2017 (AG).

Applicant answered the SOR on May 15, 2018, and elected to have his case decided on the written record in lieu of a hearing. Department Counsel submitted the Government's File of Relevant Material (FORM) on July 16, 2018. The evidence

included in the FORM is identified as Items 3-7 (Items 1 and 2 include pleadings and transmittal information). The FORM was mailed to Applicant, who received it on August 27, 2018. Applicant was given an opportunity to file objections and submit material in refutation, extenuation, or mitigation. Applicant did not file objections or submit any evidence. Items 3-7 are admitted into evidence without objection. The case was assigned to me on November 2, 2018.

Findings of Fact

Applicant admitted all the allegations in his answer to the SOR. The admissions are adopted as findings of fact. After a careful review of the pleadings and evidence, I make the following additional findings of fact.

Applicant is 44 years old. He has worked for a defense contractor since June 2017. He married in 1997 and divorced in 2016. He has three children. He has a high school diploma. He served in the Army from 1997 to 2003 and was honorably discharged.¹

The SOR alleged 19 delinquent debts totaling approximately \$51,292 and that Applicant failed to timely file his 2015 and 2016 federal tax returns. The allegations are supported by credit reports from July 2017 and January 2018, his admissions to a defense investigator in August 2017, his answers to interrogatories in March 2018, and his admissions in his answer to the SOR.²

Applicant explained that the debts were incurred during his 18 year marriage and that his ex-wife was responsible for the family finances during the marriage. He was unaware of some of the debts incurred during their marriage. Under the terms of their divorce, Applicant was responsible for the marital debt. He admitted that he does not currently have the financial resources to pay all the debts. Once financial resources become available to him, he will make efforts to pay the debts. He did not present evidence of payment or established payment plans for any of the debts. His 2015 and 2016 tax returns remain unfiled. Applicant's financial issues remain unresolved.³

Applicant's personal financial statement submitted in March 2018 shows that after his expenses, he has a negative monthly cash flow. He indicated that he was in the process of starting a second job to help him with his finances. There is no evidence of financial counseling.⁴

¹ Item 3.

² Items 2-7.

³ Items 2, 7.

⁴ Item 2, 4.

Policies

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 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, these guidelines are applied 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(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.

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 applicant or proven by Department Counsel, and 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 that an applicant may deliberately or inadvertently fail to safeguard classified information. Such decisions entail a certain degree of legally permissible extrapolation about potential, rather than actual, risk of compromise of classified information.

Section 7 of EO 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 F, Financial Considerations

AG ¶ 18 expresses the security concern for financial considerations:

Failure 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 or sensitive information. Financial distress can also be caused or exacerbated by, and thus can be a possible indicator of, other issues of personnel security concern such as excessive gambling, mental health conditions, substance misuse, or alcohol abuse or dependence. An individual who is financially overextended is at greater risk of having to engage in illegal or otherwise questionable acts to generate funds. Affluence that cannot be explained by known sources of income is also a security concern insofar as it may result from criminal activity, including espionage.

The guideline notes several conditions that could raise security concerns. I have considered all of them under AG ¶ 19 and the following potentially apply:

- (a) inability to satisfy debts;
- (b) unwillingness to satisfy debts regardless of the ability to do so;
- (c) a history of not meeting financial obligations; and
- (f) failure to file or fraudulently filing annual Federal, state, or local income tax returns or failure to pay annual Federal, state, or local income tax as required.

Applicant has delinquent debts that remain unpaid or unresolved because of his inability to pay them. His 2015 and 2016 federal tax returns remain unfiled. I find the above disqualifying conditions are raised.

The guideline also includes conditions that could mitigate security concerns arising from financial difficulties. I have considered all of the mitigating conditions under AG ¶ 20 and the following potentially apply:

- (a) 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;

- (b) 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, a death, divorce or separation, clear victimization by predatory lending practices, or identity theft), and the individual acted responsibly under the circumstances;
- (c) the individual has received or is receiving financial counseling for the problem from a legitimate and credible source, such as a non-profit credit counseling service, and there are clear indications that the problem is being resolved or is under control;
- (d) the individual initiated and is adhering to a good-faith effort to repay overdue creditors or otherwise resolve debts; and
- (g) the individual has made arrangements with the appropriate tax authority to file or pay the amount owed and is in compliance with those arrangements.

Applicant's debts are recent and remain unresolved. He did not provide sufficient evidence to show that his financial problems are unlikely to recur. AG ¶ 20(a) does not apply. Although Applicant's divorce was a circumstance beyond his control, he failed to take responsible action to deal with his debts and file his tax returns. AG ¶ 20(b) partially applies. Applicant failed to provide documentation showing any efforts to contact the creditors to set up payment plans, or make payments on the debts. There is no evidence of financial counseling or of efforts to make arrangements to file his tax returns. AG ¶¶ 20(c), 20(d), and 20(g) do not apply.

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 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 guideline 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 considered his military service and the circumstances of his divorce, but I also considered his lack of progress in resolving any of the debts or filing his tax returns. Applicant has not established a track record of financial stability.

Overall, the record evidence leaves me with questions and doubts as to Applicant's eligibility and suitability for a security clearance because of his financial status. For all these reasons, I conclude Applicant failed to mitigate the security concerns arising under Guideline F, financial considerations.

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 F: AGAINST APPLICANT

Subparagraphs 1.a – 1.t: 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.

Robert E. Coacher
Administrative Judge