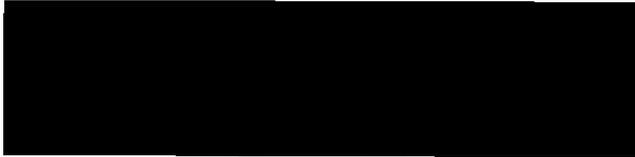


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FILE: [REDACTED] Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER Date: **MAY 18 2006**  
EAC 04 028 51825

IN RE: Petitioner: [REDACTED]  
Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Skilled Worker or Professional Pursuant to  
Section 203(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert P. Wiemann".

Robert P. Wiemann, Chief  
Administrative Appeals Office

**DISCUSSION:** The preference visa petition was denied by the Director, Vermont Service Center, and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be sustained.

The petitioner is a landscaping company. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a landscaping worker. As required by statute, a Form ETA 750, Application for Alien Employment Certification approved by the Department of Labor, accompanied the petition. The director determined that the petitioner had not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the beneficiary the proffered wage beginning on the priority date of the visa petition and denied the petition accordingly.

The record shows that the appeal is properly filed, timely and makes a specific allegation of error in law or fact. The procedural history in this case is documented by the record and incorporated into this decision. Further elaboration of the procedural history will be made only as necessary.

As set forth in the director's October 21, 2004 denial, the single issue in this case is whether or not the petitioner has the ability to pay the proffered wage as of the priority date and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence.

Section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)(i), provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing skilled labor (requiring at least two years training or experience), not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) states, in pertinent part:

*Ability of prospective employer to pay wage.* Any petition filed by or for an employment-based immigrant which requires an offer of employment must be accompanied by evidence that the prospective United States employer has the ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must demonstrate this ability at the time the priority date is established and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. Evidence of this ability shall be in the form of copies of annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements. In a case where the prospective United States employer employs 100 or more workers, the director may accept a statement from a financial officer of the organization which establishes the prospective employer's ability to pay the proffered wage. In appropriate cases, additional evidence, such as profit/loss statements, bank account records, or personnel records, may be submitted by the petitioner or requested by [Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS)].

The petitioner must demonstrate the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, which is the date the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by any office within the employment system of the Department of Labor. See 8 CFR § 204.5(d). The priority date in the instant petition is April 30, 2001. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$12.88 per hour or \$26,790.40 annually.

The AAO takes a *de novo* look at issues raised in the denial of this petition. See *Dor v. INS*, 891 F.2d 997, 1002 n. 9 (2d Cir. 1989)(noting that the AAO reviews appeals on a *de novo* basis). The AAO considers all pertinent evidence in the record, including new evidence properly submitted upon appeal<sup>1</sup>. Relevant evidence submitted on

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<sup>1</sup> The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the Form I-290B, which are incorporated into the regulations by the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(a)(1). The record in the instant case provides no reason to preclude consideration of any of the documents newly submitted on appeal. See *Matter of Soriano*, 19 I&N Dec. 764 (BIA 1988).

appeal includes copies of the petitioner's 2002 and 2003 Forms 1120S, U.S. Income Tax Returns for an S Corporation, a copy of the beneficiary's 2003 Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, a copy of the petitioner's 2002 depreciation schedule, a copy of a non-precedent decision, a letter from the petitioner's accountant, a copy of the *Interpreter Releases*, Vol. 81, No. 29 – July 26, 2004, Pages 963-968, and copies of the petitioner's 2002 and 2003 (through September 30, 2003) bank statements. Other relevant evidence in the record includes copies of the beneficiary's 2001 and 2002 Forms W-2 and a copy of the petitioner's 2001 Form 1120S. The record does not contain any other evidence relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.

The petitioner's 2001 through 2003 Forms 1120S reflect taxable incomes before net operating loss deduction and special deductions or net income of \$10,560, -\$3,034, and \$24,109, respectively. The petitioner's 2001 through 2003 Forms 1120S also reflect net current assets of -\$39,569, -\$52,703, and -\$51,604, respectively.

The beneficiary's 2001 through 2003 Forms W-2 issued by the petitioner reflect wages earned of \$19,800, \$18,600, and \$18,600, respectively.

The petitioner's 2002 through 2003 (through September 30, 2003) bank statements reflect balances ranging from a low of \$1,469.00 to a high of \$17,034.34.

The accountant's letter states that "the Company's tax returns may reflect minimal taxable income and retained earnings for each of the three years, [however] this does not represent an accurate account of the Company's financial condition" due to its tax reporting being on a hybrid cash basis of accounting. The accountant further states that the petitioner's revenues are recorded when received and expenses are recorded when actually paid; that its customer's receivables are not recorded as assets; that the company takes advantage of Section 179 deductions for all qualified property purchased, resulting in a lower taxable income and a lower net worth; and that work in progress is not recorded resulting in an improper matching of revenue and expenses in a given year, and since the asset is not recorded, a lower net worth will result.

On appeal, counsel states that the petitioner has established its ability to pay the proffered wage of \$26,790.40 based on its bank statements, its depreciation, and the wages paid to the beneficiary. Counsel cites a non-precedent decision and the *Interpreter Releases*, Vol. 81, No. 29 – July 26, 2004, Pages 963-968 in support of her claims.

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of an ETA 750 labor certification application establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on the ETA 750, the petitioner must establish that the job offer was realistic as of the priority date and that the offer remained realistic for each year thereafter, until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. The petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is an essential element in evaluating whether a job offer is realistic. *See Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977). *See also* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2). In evaluating whether a job offer is realistic, CIS requires the petitioner to demonstrate financial resources sufficient to pay the beneficiary's proffered wages, although the totality of the circumstances affecting the petitioning business will be considered if the evidence warrants such consideration. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage, CIS will first examine whether the petitioner employed the beneficiary at the time the priority date was established. If the petitioner establishes by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to or greater than the proffered wage, this evidence will be considered *prima facie* proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. In the instant case, on the Form ETA 750B, signed by the beneficiary on April 27, 2001, the beneficiary claims to

have been employed by the petitioner from April 1998 until the present. In support of the petition, the petitioner submitted copies of the beneficiary's 2001 through 2003 Forms W-2 which reflect wages earned of \$19,800 or \$6,990.40 less than the proffered wage of \$26,790.40 in 2001, \$18,600 or \$8,190.40 less than the proffered wage of \$26,790.40 in 2002, and \$18,600 or \$8,190.40 less than the proffered wage of \$26,790.40 in 2003. The petitioner is obligated to establish that it has sufficient funds to pay the difference between the wages actually paid to the beneficiary and the proffered wage.

As an alternative means of determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage, CIS will next examine the petitioner's net income figure as reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses. Reliance on federal income tax returns as a basis for determining a petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is well established by judicial precedent. *Elatos Restaurant Corp. v. Sava*, 632 F. Supp. 1049, 1054 (S.D.N.Y. 1986) (citing *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F.2d 1305 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1984)); *see also Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F. Supp. 532 (N.D. Tex. 1989); *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F.Supp. 1080 (S.D.N.Y. 1985); *Ubeda v. Palmer*, 539 F. Supp. 647 (N.D. Ill. 1982), *aff'd.*, 703 F.2d 571 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1983). In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc.*, the court held that CIS had properly relied on the petitioner's net income figure, as stated on the petitioner's corporate income tax returns, rather than the petitioner's gross income. 623 F.Supp at 1084. The court specifically rejected the argument that CIS should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income. Finally, there is no precedent that would allow the petitioner to "add back to net cash the depreciation expense charged for the year." *See also Elatos Restaurant Corp.*, 632 F. Supp. at 1054.

Nevertheless, the petitioner's net income is not the only statistic that can be used to demonstrate a petitioner's ability to pay a proffered wage. If the net income the petitioner demonstrates it had available during that period, if any, added to the wages paid to the beneficiary during the period, if any, do not equal the amount of the proffered wage or more, CIS will review the petitioner's assets. The petitioner's total assets include depreciable assets that the petitioner uses in its business. Those depreciable assets will not be converted to cash during the ordinary course of business and will not, therefore, become funds available to pay the proffered wage. Further, the petitioner's total assets must be balanced by the petitioner's liabilities. Otherwise, they cannot properly be considered in the determination of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. Rather, CIS will consider *net current assets* as an alternative method of demonstrating the ability to pay the proffered wage.

Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner's current assets and current liabilities.<sup>2</sup> A corporation's year-end current assets are shown on Schedule L, lines 1 through 6. Its year-end current liabilities are shown on lines 16 through 18. If a corporation's end-of-year net current assets are equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the petitioner is expected to be able to pay the proffered wage out of those net current assets. The petitioner's net current assets in 2001 through 2003 were -\$39,569, -\$52,703, and -\$51,604, respectively. As the net current assets were all negative in 2001 through 2003, the petitioner could not have paid the difference between the actual wages paid to the beneficiary and the proffered wage in those years from its net current assets.

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<sup>2</sup> According to *Barron's Dictionary of Accounting Terms* 117 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2000), "current assets" consist of items having (in most cases) a life of one year or less, such as cash, marketable securities, inventory and prepaid expenses. "Current liabilities" are obligations payable (in most cases) within one year, such as accounts payable, short-term notes payable, and accrued expenses (such as taxes and salaries). *Id.* at 118.

Counsel contends that the petitioner's depreciation expenses should be considered when determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage of \$26,790.40. However, counsel's argument that the petitioner's depreciation deduction should be included in the calculation of its ability to pay the proffered wage is unconvincing.

A depreciation deduction does not require or represent a specific cash expenditure during the year claimed. It is a systematic allocation of the cost of a tangible long-term asset. It may be taken to represent the diminution in value of buildings and equipment, or to represent the accumulation of funds necessary to replace perishable equipment and buildings. But the cost of equipment and buildings and the value lost as they deteriorate is an actual expense of doing business, whether it is spread over more years or concentrated into fewer.

While the expense does not require or represent the current use of cash, neither is it available to pay wages. No precedent exists that would allow the petitioner to add its depreciation deduction to the amount available to pay the proffered wage. *Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F.Supp. 532 (N.D. Texas 1989). *See also Elatos Restaurant Corp. v. Sava*, 632 F.Supp. 1049 (S.D.N.Y. 1985). The petitioner's election of accounting and depreciation methods accords a specific amount of depreciation expense to each given year. The petitioner may not now shift that expense to some other year as convenient to its present purpose, nor treat it as a fund available to pay the proffered wage. Further, amounts spent on long-term tangible assets are a real expense, however allocated.

Counsel asserts that the petitioner's bank statements should be considered when CIS determines the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage and cites a non-precedent decision in support of her assertion. Counsel's reliance on the balances in the petitioner's bank accounts is misplaced. First, bank statements are not among the three types of evidence, enumerated in 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2), required to illustrate a petitioner's ability to pay a proffered wage. While this regulation allows additional material "in appropriate cases," the petitioner in this case has not demonstrated why the documentation specified at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) is inapplicable or otherwise paints an inaccurate financial picture of the petitioner. Second, bank statements show the amount in an account on a given date, and cannot show the sustainable ability to pay a proffered wage. Third, no evidence was submitted to demonstrate that the funds reported on the petitioner's bank statements somehow reflect additional available funds that were not reflected on its tax return, such as the petitioner's taxable income (income minus deductions) or the cash specified on Schedule L that will be considered below in determining the petitioner's net current assets. In addition, while 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c) provides that precedent decisions of CIS are binding on all its employees in the administration of the Act, unpublished decisions are not similarly binding. Precedent decisions must be designated and published in bound volumes or as interim decisions. 8 C.F.R. § 103.9(a).

Counsel points to the accountant's letter in support of her contention that current assets did exceed current liabilities; and, therefore, CIS was in error in its interpretation of the petitioner's tax returns. The petitioner's tax returns were prepared pursuant to cash convention, in which revenue is recognized when it is received, and expenses are recognized when they are paid. This office would, in the alternative, have accepted tax returns prepared pursuant to accrual convention, if those were the tax returns the petitioner had actually submitted to IRS.

This office is not, however, persuaded by an analysis in which the petitioner, or anyone on its behalf, seeks to rely on tax returns or financial statements prepared pursuant to one method, but then seeks to shift revenue or expenses from one year to another as convenient to the petitioner's present purpose. If revenues are not recognized in a given year pursuant to the cash accounting then the petitioner, whose taxes are prepared pursuant to cash rather than accrual, and who relies on its tax returns in order to show its ability to pay the proffered wage, may not use those revenues as evidence of its ability to pay the proffered wage during that year. Similarly, if expenses are recognized in a given year, the petitioner may not shift those expenses to some other year in an effort to show its ability to pay the proffered wage pursuant to some hybrid of accrual and cash accounting. The amounts shown on the petitioner's tax returns shall be considered as they were submitted to IRS, not as amended pursuant to the accountant's adjustments. If the accountant wished to persuade this office that accrual accounting supports the petitioners continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, then the accountant was obliged to prepare and submit audited financial statements pertinent to the petitioning business prepared according to generally accepted accounting principles.

Counsel cites the *Interpreter Releases* with regard to statements made by William Yates, then Service Center Director, at an AILA conference, in support of her assertion that CIS has misinterpreted the underlying purpose behind the requirement of an employer demonstrating an ability to pay. Counsel quotes:

“ . . .the statutory requirement (of establishing the ability to pay) is to establish that it's a bona fide company. Ability to pay was actually meant, when it was first put into [the] regulations, to be a tool that officers apply, not a sword, if you will. So if you have a company that's been in business for years, there really is no question about the ability to pay or the bona fides of the company.”

In evaluating whether a job offer is realistic as of the priority date and that the offer remained realistic for each year thereafter, CIS requires the petitioner to demonstrate financial resources sufficient to pay the first year of the beneficiary's proffered wages and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence, although the totality of the circumstances affecting the petitioning business will be considered if the evidence warrants such consideration. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967). When adjudicating a petition, CIS must follow the clear language of the regulations, which may not be usurped by an interoffice guidance memorandum without binding legal effect.

Finally, if the petitioner does not have sufficient net income or net current assets to pay the proffered salary, CIS may consider the overall magnitude of the entity's business activities. Even when the petitioner shows insufficient net income or net current assets, CIS may consider the totality of the circumstances concerning a petitioner's financial performance. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967). In *Matter of Sonogawa*, the Regional Commissioner considered an immigrant visa petition, which had been filed by a small “custom dress and boutique shop” on behalf of a clothes designer. The district director denied the petition after determining that the beneficiary's annual wage of \$6,240 was considerably in excess of the employer's net profit of \$280 for the year of filing. On appeal, the Regional Commissioner considered an array of factors beyond the petitioner's simple net profit, including news articles, financial data, the petitioner's reputation and clientele, the number of employees, future business plans, and explanations of the petitioner's temporary financial difficulties. Despite the petitioner's obviously inadequate net income, the

Regional Commissioner looked beyond the petitioner's uncharacteristic business loss and found that the petitioner's expectations of continued business growth and increasing profits were reasonable. *Id.* at 615. Based on an evaluation of the totality of the petitioner's circumstances, the Regional Commissioner determined that the petitioner had established the ability to pay the beneficiary the stipulated wages.

As in *Matter of Sonogawa*, CIS may, at its discretion, consider evidence relevant to a petitioner's financial ability that falls outside of a petitioner's net income and net current assets. CIS may consider such factors as the number of years that the petitioner has been doing business, the established historical growth of the petitioner's business, the overall number of employees, the occurrence of any uncharacteristic business expenditures or losses, the petitioner's reputation within its industry, whether the beneficiary is replacing a former employee or an outsourced service, or any other evidence that CIS deems to be relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. In the instant case, the petitioner has provided three tax returns. Two of these tax returns (2001 and 2003) demonstrate that the petitioner has the ability to pay the proffered wage. Since the petitioner has been in business for 23 years, there is no reason to doubt that the petitioner will not remain in business. Therefore, the petitioner has established that the job offer is bona fide based on the totality of the circumstances.

After a review of the record, it is concluded that the petitioner has established its ability to pay the salary offered as of the priority date of the petition and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence.

For the reasons discussed above and the assertions of counsel on appeal, the evidence submitted on appeal overcomes the decision of the director.

In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has been met.

**ORDER:** The appeal is sustained.