

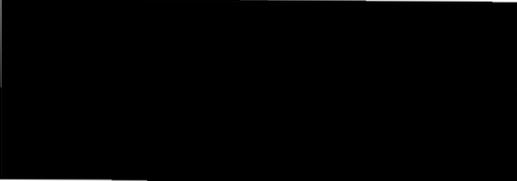


U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

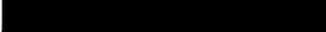
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FILE:



Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

Date: MAY 16 2007

EAC 05 163 53939

IN RE:

Petitioner:

Beneficiary:



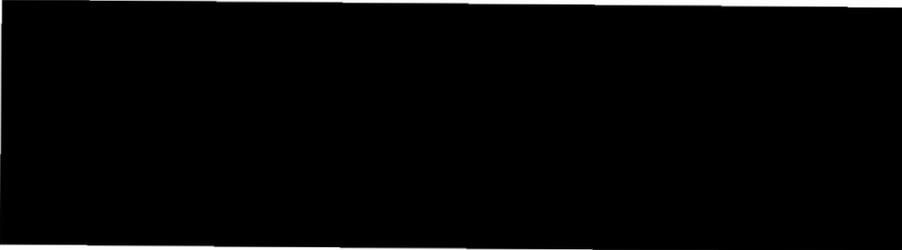
PETITION: Immigrant petition for Alien Worker as a Skilled Worker or Professional pursuant to section 203(b)(3) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3).

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER: SELF-REPRESENTED

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.

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 dismissed.

The petitioner is a Japanese restaurant. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a foreign food, specialty cook. As required by statute, the petition is accompanied by a Form ETA 750, Application for Alien Employment Certification, approved by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). 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. Therefore, the director denied the petition.

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 the decision. Further elaboration of the procedural history will be made only as necessary.

As set forth in the director's November 9, 2005 denial, the single issue in this case is whether 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 Immigration and Nationality Act (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 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.

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 is accepted for processing by any office within the employment system of the DOL. *See* 8 CFR § 204.5(d). The petitioner must also demonstrate that, on the priority date, the beneficiary had the qualifications stated on its Form ETA 750 as certified by the DOL and submitted with the petition. *See Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N Dec. 158 (Act. Reg. Comm. 1977).

Here, the Form ETA 750 was accepted on December 23, 2002. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$20 per hour, 40 hours per week or \$41,600 annually. The Form ETA 750 indicates that the position requires two years of experience as a foreign food, specialty cook.

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 on appeal.¹ Relevant evidence in

¹ The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the Form I-290B, which

the record includes: the petitioner's Form 1120S, U.S. Income Tax Return for an S Corporation, for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004; two letters from [REDACTED] a Certified Public Accountant (C.P.A.), dated April 7, 2005 and August 25, 2005, respectively; a letter from [REDACTED], the petitioner's president, dated May 3, 2005; and a letter from [REDACTED] and the petitioner's vice-president dated November 30, 2005. The record does not contain any other evidence relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the wage.

The record shows that the petitioner is structured as an S corporation. On the petition, the petitioner claimed that it was established in 1992 and that it currently employs 22 workers. According to the tax returns in the record, the petitioner's fiscal year coincides with the calendar year. On the Form ETA 750B, which was signed by the beneficiary on November 25, 2002, the beneficiary does not claim to have worked for the petitioner.

On appeal, the petitioner's president and vice-president assert that the director erred in denying the petition. They indicate that depreciation and amortization amounts as well as officers' compensation do not represent the payment of actual expenses. Consequently, Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) should view these as funds available to pay the proffered wage and should find that the petitioner has demonstrated the ability to pay. The petitioner's president and vice-president also indicate that CIS should consider their willingness to make a loan to the petitioner to cover the proffered wage as evidence of the petitioner's continuing ability to pay the wage.

Mr. [REDACTED] the C.P.A. for the petitioner, also asserts in his letter dated August 25, 2005 that CIS should consider officers' compensation and depreciation expenses as funds available to pay the proffered wage and find that the petitioner has demonstrated the continuing ability to pay the wage. In his letter dated April 7, 2005, Mr. [REDACTED] indicates that based on his familiarity with the petitioner's financial condition and in his professional judgment, the petitioner is capable of paying the proffered wage.

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of the Form ETA 750 establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on that Form 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 Sonegawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage during a given period, CIS will first examine whether the petitioner employed and paid the beneficiary during that period. If the petitioner establishes by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the evidence will be considered *prima facie* proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. In this case, the petitioner has not established nor even asserted that it employed and paid the beneficiary the full proffered wage or any portion of the wage during any relevant timeframe from the priority date through the present.

are incorporated into the regulations by the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(a)(1). The record in this 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).

If the petitioner does not establish that it employed and paid the beneficiary an amount at least equal to the proffered wage during that period, CIS will next examine the net income figure reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses, contrary to the assertions made by the petitioner's owners and its C.P.A. 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 (9th Cir. 1984)); see also *Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F. Supp. 532 (N.D. Texas 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 (7th Cir. 1983). Reliance on the petitioner's gross receipts and wage expense is misplaced. Showing that the petitioner's gross receipts exceeded the proffered wage is insufficient. Similarly, showing that the petitioner paid wages in excess of the proffered wage is insufficient.

In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. at 1084, the court held that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now 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. The court specifically rejected the argument that the Service should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income. The court in *Chi-Feng Chang* further noted:

Plaintiffs also contend the depreciation amounts on the 1985 and 1986 returns are non-cash deductions. Plaintiffs thus request that the court *sua sponte* add back to net cash the **depreciation expense charged for the year**. Plaintiffs cite no legal authority for this proposition. This argument has likewise been presented before and rejected. See *Elatos*, 632 F. Supp. at 1054. [CIS] and judicial precedent support the use of tax returns and the *net income figures* in determining petitioner's ability to pay. Plaintiffs' argument that these figures should be revised by the court by adding back depreciation is without support.

(Emphasis in original.) *Chi-Feng* at 537.

The tax returns demonstrate the following financial information concerning the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered annual wage of \$41,600 from the priority date:

- In 2002, the Form 1120S states a net income (loss)² of -\$19,394.
- In 2003, the Form 1120S states a net income (loss) of -\$47,724.
- In 2004, the Form 1120S states a net income (loss) of -\$8,667.

Therefore, for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the 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 may not, therefore, be considered funds available to pay the proffered wage. Also the petitioner's liabilities must be subtracted from the petitioner's total assets, when analyzing the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. Thus, CIS will consider net current assets as an alternative method of demonstrating the ability to pay the proffered wage.

For purposes of this analysis, ordinary income (loss) as reported on Line 23 of the Schedule K attached to the Form 1120S shall be considered the petitioner's net income.

Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner's current assets and current liabilities.³ 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 the total of a corporation's end-of-year net current assets and the wages paid to the beneficiary (if any) are equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the petitioner is expected to be able to pay the proffered wage using those net current assets.

- The petitioner's net current assets (liabilities) during 2002 were -\$30,716.
- The petitioner's net current assets (liabilities) during 2003 were -\$45,846.
- The petitioner's net current assets (liabilities) during 2004 were -\$65,903.

Therefore, for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004, the petitioner did not have sufficient net current assets to pay the proffered wage.

In sum, the petitioner has not established through wages paid to the beneficiary, net income, or net current assets that it had the continuing ability to pay the beneficiary the proffered wage as of the priority date and through subsequent years.

Further, there is no proper documentation in the record to support any assertion that the beneficiary could assume a portion of the compensation which the petitioner paid its officers in this case such that it may be considered funds available to pay the proffered wage. For example, there is no notarized, sworn statement from the petitioner's owner in the record which attests to the claim that the beneficiary would assume these officers' duties and that the officers would or could then forego any corresponding compensation such that it might be used to pay the beneficiary's wage. There is also no documentation in the record such as the officers' Forms W-2, Wage and Tax Statements, or Forms 1040, U.S. Individual Income Tax Return, to verify the salary which the petitioner paid the officers from the priority date onwards.⁴ Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).

Also, the petitioner's owners' claim that they would be willing to make a loan to the petitioner, if needed, in order to pay the proffered wage is not relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay. Any loan or other credit available to the petitioner represents a liability, not an asset. As such, loans are not part of the calculation of the funds available to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must show the ability to pay the proffered wage out of its own funds, rather than out of the funds of a lender.

Finally, where the petitioner has not demonstrated sufficient net income or net current assets to pay the proffered salary, CIS may consider the overall magnitude of the entity's business activities and the totality of

³ According to *Barron's Dictionary of Accounting Terms* 117 (3rd 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.

⁴ This office also notes that the record indicates that the petitioner's two officers were paid only \$5,991 each during 2004. Thus, even if the petitioner were able to document that this amount were available for the beneficiary, and if the total officers' compensation of \$11,982 were added to the petitioner's negative net income or negative net current assets for that year, the petitioner would still have failed to show an ability to pay the proffered wage from the priority date onwards.

the circumstances concerning a petitioner's financial performance, when determining its ability to pay the proffered wage. *See Matter of Sonegawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967). In *Sonegawa*, the Regional Commissioner considered an immigrant visa petition that 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 more than the petitioner's net profit of \$280 for the year of filing. On appeal, the Regional Commissioner considered an array of factors beyond the petitioner's net profit, including financial data, the petitioner's reputation and clientele, its number of employees, future business plans, news articles, and explanations of the petitioner's temporary financial difficulties. The Regional Commissioner looked beyond the petitioner's inadequate net income for the year of filing 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 proffered wage.

Accordingly, CIS may, in 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 this case, however, the only forms of evidence provided by the petitioner which are directly relevant to its ability to pay the wage are the Forms 1120S for 2002, 2003 and 2004. This is not sufficient evidence to establish that the petitioner has met all of its obligations in the past or to establish its historical growth. In addition, such evidence is not sufficient to establish whether unusual circumstances exist in this case to parallel those in *Sonegawa*, nor to establish whether 2002 through 2004 were uncharacteristically unprofitable years for the petitioner. Furthermore, the unsupported assertions of Mr. [REDACTED] C.P.A. to the petitioner, in his letter dated April 7, 2005, that the petitioner is in a financial position to pay the wage, despite the information listed on its tax returns, are not sufficient to meet the burden of proof in these proceedings. *See Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).

The evidence submitted does not establish that the petitioner had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not met that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.