



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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FILE:

SRC 06 272 50293

Office: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER

Date:

OCT 21 2008

IN RE:

Petitioner:

Beneficiary:

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.


Robert P. Wiemann, Chief
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The preference visa petition was denied by the Director, Texas Service Center, and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be remanded for further consideration and entry of a new decision.

The petitioner is a nursing home. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a bookkeeper. 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 original November 13, 2006, 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 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 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 either 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 C.F.R. § 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 \$12.36 per hour or \$25,708.80 annually.

The AAO maintains plenary power to review each appeal on a de novo basis. 5 U.S.C. § 557(b) ("On appeal from or review of the initial decision, the agency has all the powers which it would have in making

the initial decision except as it may limit the issues on notice or by rule."); *see also, Janka v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., NTSB*, 925 F.2d 1147, 1149 (9th Cir. 1991). The AAO's de novo authority has been long recognized by the federal courts. *See, e.g. Dor v. INS*, 891 F.2d 997, 1002 n. 9 (2d Cir. 1989). The AAO considers all pertinent evidence in the record, including new evidence properly submitted upon appeal.¹ Relevant evidence submitted on appeal includes counsel's brief, copies of the petitioner's 2001 and 2002 Forms 1120S, U.S. Income Tax Return for an S Corporation, a copy of the petitioner's bank statement for the period September 1, 2006 through September 30, 2006, and a letter with counsel's letterhead, dated December 5, 2006, from [REDACTED]. Other relevant evidence includes copies of the petitioner's 2003 through 2005 Forms 1120S and a copy of the petitioner's unaudited 2006 financial statements for the period January through August 2006.² The record does not contain any other evidence relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.

The petitioner's 2001 through 2005 Forms 1120S reflect net incomes from Schedule K of \$78,140, \$293,147, \$332,605, -\$33,846, and \$272,816, respectively. The petitioner's 2001 through 2005 Forms 1120S also reflect net current assets of -\$6,843, \$33,728, \$87,691, -\$28,482, and \$132,336, respectively.

The petitioner's bank statement for the period September 1, 2006 through September 30, 2006 reflects a beginning balance of \$261,560.50 and an ending balance of \$298,092.77.

The letter, dated December 5, 2006, from [REDACTED] states:

Concerning [the petitioner's] 2004 income as stated on its federal income tax return, please note that many factors lead the business to showing a loss on the 2004 tax returns, but those factors did not affect the business' ability to meet its financial obligations.

First, the tax return reflects two non-reoccurring losses claimed in 2004. The business had a theft of \$75,000 which was claimed in 2004 and the business paid a legal settlement of \$75,000 which was claimed in 2004.

Second, the 2004 gross sales were approximately \$200,000 less than anticipated due to the State of Florida refusing to pay all the amounts that it had contracted to pay us. We sued the State and eventually recovered around \$32,000, but that money was not recovered until 2006.

Finally, the business had over \$80,000 on hand at the end of 2004 and it could have easily met an additional financial obligation of \$31,200.

¹ 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).

² The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) makes clear that where a petitioner relies on financial statements to demonstrate its ability to pay the proffered wage, those financial statements must be audited. As there is no accountant's report accompanying these statements, the AAO cannot conclude that they are audited statements. **Unaudited financial statements are the representations of management.** The unsupported representations of management are not reliable evidence and are insufficient to demonstrate the ability to pay the proffered wage. Therefore, the AAO will not consider the petitioner's 2006 unaudited financial statements when determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 from the priority date of April 30, 2001.

On appeal, counsel claims that the petitioner has established its ability to pay the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 based on its tax returns and its bank statement. Counsel also notes that when the net loss from a theft of property of \$75,000 in 2004 is removed from the petitioner's ordinary income, the result is more than enough to pay the proffered wage in 2004.

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 23, 2001, the beneficiary does not claim the petitioner as a past or present employer. In addition, counsel has not submitted any Forms W-2 or Forms 1099-MISC, Miscellaneous Income, issued by the petitioner on behalf of the beneficiary, for the pertinent years, 2001 through 2005. Therefore, the petitioner has not established that it employed the beneficiary in fiscal years 2001 through 2005. Hence, the petitioner must establish that it had sufficient funds to pay the entire proffered wage of \$25,708.80 in the years 2001 through 2005.

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 supported by federal case law. *See 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. 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 (7th 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 Elatos Restaurant Corp.*, 632 F. Supp. at 1054. 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 Chang*, 719 F. Supp. at 537

Where an S corporation's income is exclusively from a trade or business, CIS considers net income to be the figure for ordinary income, shown on line 21 of page one of the petitioner's IRS Form 1120S. However, where an S corporation has income, credits, deductions or other adjustments from sources other than a trade or business, they are reported on Schedule K. If the Schedule K has relevant entries for additional income, credits, deductions or other adjustments, net income is found on line 23 (1997-2003) or line 17e (2004-2005) of Schedule K. See Instructions for Form 1120S, at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1120s.pdf> (accessed March 22, 2007) (indicating that Schedule K is a summary schedule of all shareholder's shares of the corporation's income, deductions, credits, etc.). Because the petitioner did have additional 2001 through 2005 income and deductions shown on its Schedule K, the petitioner's net income is found on line 23 of Schedule K for the years 2001 through 2003 and on line 17e of Schedule K for the years 2004 and 2005.

In the instant case, the petitioner's 2001 through 2005 net incomes were \$78,140, \$293,147, \$332,605, -\$33,846, and \$272,816, respectively. The petitioner could have paid the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 from its net incomes in 2001 through 2003 and 2005, but not in 2004. Therefore, the petitioner has established its continuing ability to pay the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 in the years 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005. The petitioner has not established its ability to pay the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 in 2004.

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.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 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 2004 (the petitioner has already established its ability to pay the proffered wage in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005 from its net incomes in those years) were -\$28,482. The petitioner could not have paid the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 from its net current assets in 2004.

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.

On appeal, counsel asserts the petitioner has established its ability to pay the proffered wage of \$25,708.80 in 2004 by removing a net loss from a property theft of \$75,000 in 2004, by its bank statement, by its ordinary incomes in previous and subsequent years, and by the large amount of wages paid out in the years 2001 through 2005.

Counsel is correct in part. However, counsel's reliance on the balances in the petitioner's bank account 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 cannot show the sustainable ability to pay a proffered wage as funds available to pay the proffered wage in one month would no longer be available the next month. 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 cash specified on Schedule L that was considered above in determining the petitioner's net current assets. Therefore, in the instant case, the AAO will not consider the petitioner's bank statement when determining the petitioner's continuing ability to pay the proffered wage from the priority date of April 30, 2001.

However, 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. at 612. 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 this case, in light of the petitioner's long and continuing business presence (more than 9 years), its large revenues (more than \$1,000,000 each year), its large salary output, and its minimal outlay relative to the beneficiary's wages compared to the petitioner's overall income (approximately 1.66% in 2004, the year the petitioner lacks the ability to pay the proffered wage based on its tax returns), the AAO finds that the petitioner could pay the proffered wage from the priority date and continuing to the present.

In examining a petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage, the fundamental focus of the CIS' determination is whether the employer is making a realistic job offer and has the overall financial ability to satisfy the proffered wage. *Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142, 145 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977). Accordingly, after a review of the petitioner's federal tax returns and all other relevant evidence, we conclude that the petitioner has established that it had the ability to pay the salary offered as of the priority date of the petition and continuing to present.

Beyond the decision of the director, the record in this case lacks an original copy of the Form ETA 750 labor certification. An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by the AAO even if the Service Center does not identify all of the grounds for denial in the initial decision. *See Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 299 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1043 (E.D. Cal. 2001), *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also 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 regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3) states in pertinent part:

Initial evidence –(i) Labor certification or evidence that alien qualifies for Labor Market Information Pilot Program. Every petition under this classification must be accompanied by an individual labor certification from the Department of Labor, by an application for Schedule A designation, or by documentation to establish that the alien qualifies for one of the shortage occupations in the Department of Labor's Labor Market Information Pilot Program. . .

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(1) states in pertinent part:

Initial evidence. (1) General. Specific requirements for initial supporting documents for the various employment-based immigrant classifications are set forth in this section. In general, ordinary legible photocopies of such documents (except for labor certifications from the Department of Labor) will be acceptable for initial filing and approval. However, at the discretion of the director, original documents may be required in individual cases. Evidence relating to qualifying experience or training shall be in the form of letter(s) from current or former employer(s) or trainer(s) and shall include the name, address, and title of the writer, and a specific description of the duties performed by the alien or of the training received. If such evidence is unavailable, other documentation relating to the alien's experience or training will be considered.

(Emphasis added.)

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(4) states:

Submitting copies of documents. Application and petition forms must be submitted in the original. Forms and documents issued to support an application or petition, such as labor certifications, Form IAP-66, medical examinations, affidavits, formal consultations, and other statements, must be submitted in the original unless previously filed with the CIS.

The authority to adjudicate appeals is delegated to the AAO by the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) pursuant to the authority vested in him through the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107-296. *See* DHS Delegation Number 0150.1 (effective March 1, 2003); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 2.1(2003). The

AAO exercises appellate jurisdiction over the matters described at 8 C.F.R. § 103.1(f)(3)(iii) (as in effect on February 28, 2003). *See* DHS Delegation Number 0150.1(U) *supra*; 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(a)(iv).

Among the appellate authorities are appeals from denials of petitions for immigrant visa classification based on employment, “except when the denial of the petition is based upon lack of a certification by the Secretary of Labor under section 212(a)(5)(A) of the Act.” 8 C.F.R. § 103.1(f)(3)(iii)(B) (2003 ed.). However, in this case, there is a labor certification in the record of proceeding, but it is a copy and an original is required.

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.30(e) states:

Duplicate labor certifications.

- 1) The Certifying Officer shall issue a duplicate labor certification at the written request of a Consular or Immigration Officer. The Certifying Officer shall issue such duplicate labor certifications only to the Consular or Immigration Officer who initiated the request.
- 2) The Certifying Officer shall issue a duplicate labor certification to a Consular or Immigration Officer at the written request of an alien, employer, or an alien’s or employer’s attorney/agent. Such request for a duplicate labor certification must be addressed to the Certifying Officer who issued the labor certification; must include documentary evidence from a Consular or Immigration Officer that a visa application or visa petition, as appropriate, has been filed; and must include a Consular Officer or DHS tracking number.

In the instant case, the record does not contain any information that indicates that the director requested the original labor certification or that the petitioner was unable to provide the original labor certification.

Since there is no evidence in the record that the director attempted to obtain the original labor certification as required by 20 C.F.R. § 656.30(e) and since there is no evidence that the petitioner is unable to provide the original labor certification, the director must afford the petitioner reasonable time to provide the original labor certification or provide evidence as to why the original labor certification is unavailable. The director shall then render a new decision based on the evidence of record as it relates to the regulatory requirements for eligibility with special attention placed on the AAO’s decision regarding the petitioner’s ability to pay the proffered wage. As always, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361.

ORDER: The director’s November 13, 2006 decision is withdrawn. The petition is remanded to the director to be adjudicated on its merits with special attention placed on the AAO’s decision regarding the petitioner’s ability to pay the proffered wage and for entry of a new decision that is to be certified to the AAO for review.