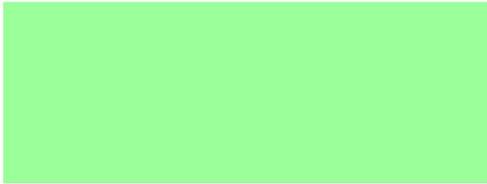


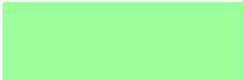


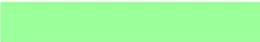
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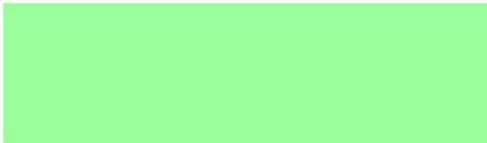
Date: **JUL 08 2014** Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

FILE: 

IN RE: Self-Petitioner: 

PETITION: Petition for Immigrant Abused Spouse Pursuant to Section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(A)(iii)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) in your case.

This is a non-precedent decision. The AAO does not announce new constructions of law nor establish agency policy through non-precedent decisions. If you believe the AAO incorrectly applied current law or policy to your case or if you seek to present new facts for consideration, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen, respectively. Any motion must be filed on a Notice of Appeal or Motion (Form I-290B) within 33 days of the date of this decision. **Please review the Form I-290B instructions at <http://www.uscis.gov/forms> for the latest information on fee, filing location, and other requirements. See also 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. Do not file a motion directly with the AAO.**

Thank you,



Ron Rosenberg
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Vermont Service Center, (the director) denied the immigrant visa petition and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed and the petition will remain denied.

The petitioner seeks immigrant classification under section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(A)(iii), as an alien battered or subjected to extreme cruelty by a United States citizen.

The director denied the petition for failure to establish that the petitioner entered into marriage with her husband in good faith and pursuant to the section 204(g) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(g), bar against the approval of immigrant visa petitions based on marriages contracted while the alien was in removal proceedings.

On appeal, counsel submits a brief and additional evidence.

Applicable Law

Section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii) of the Act provides that an alien who is the spouse of a United States citizen may self-petition for immigrant classification if the alien demonstrates that he or she entered into the marriage with the United States citizen spouse in good faith and that during the marriage, the alien or a child of the alien was battered or subjected to extreme cruelty perpetrated by the alien's spouse. In addition, the alien must show that he or she is eligible to be classified as an immediate relative under section 201(b)(2)(A)(i) of the Act, resided with the abusive spouse, and is a person of good moral character. Section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(II) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(A)(iii)(II).

Section 204(a)(1)(J) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(J) states, in pertinent part:

In acting on petitions filed under clause (iii) or (iv) of subparagraph (A) . . . , or in making determinations under subparagraphs (C) and (D), the [Secretary of Homeland Security] shall consider any credible evidence relevant to the petition. The determination of what evidence is credible and the weight to be given that evidence shall be within the sole discretion of the [Secretary of Homeland Security].

The eligibility requirements are further explicated in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(c)(1), which states, in pertinent part:

(ix) *Good faith marriage.* A spousal self-petition cannot be approved if the self-petitioner entered into the marriage to the abuser for the primary purpose of circumventing the immigration laws. A self-petition will not be denied, however, solely because the spouses are not living together and the marriage is no longer viable.

The evidentiary guidelines for a self-petition under section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii) of the Act are further explicated in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(c)(2), which states, in pertinent part:

Evidence for a spousal self-petition –

(i) *General.* Self-petitioners are encouraged to submit primary evidence whenever possible. The Service will consider, however, any credible evidence relevant to the petition. The determination of what evidence is credible and the weight to be given that evidence shall be within the sole discretion of the Service.

* * *

(vii) *Good faith marriage.* Evidence of good faith at the time of marriage may include, but is not limited to, proof that one spouse has been listed as the other's spouse on insurance policies, property leases, income tax forms, or bank accounts; and testimony or other evidence regarding courtship, wedding ceremony, shared residence and experiences. Other types of readily available evidence might include the birth certificates of children born to the abuser and the spouse; police, medical, or court documents providing information about the relationship; and affidavits of persons with personal knowledge of the relationship. All credible relevant evidence will be considered.

In addition, the regulations require that to remain eligible for immigration classification, a self-petitioner must comply with the provisions of section 204(g) of the Act. 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(c)(1)(iv).

Section 204(g) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(g), prescribes:

Restriction on petitions based on marriages entered while in exclusion or deportation proceedings. – Notwithstanding subsection (a), except as provided in section 245(e)(3), a petition may not be approved to grant an alien immediate relative status or preference status by reason of a marriage which was entered into during the period [in which administrative or judicial proceedings are pending], until the alien has resided outside the United States for a 2-year period beginning after the date of the marriage.

Section 245(e) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1255(e), provides an exception to section 204(g) of the Act as follows:

Restriction on adjustment of status based on marriages entered while in exclusion or deportation proceedings –

- (1) Except as provided in paragraph (3), an alien who is seeking to receive an immigrant visa on the basis of a marriage which was entered into during the period described in paragraph (2) may not have the alien's status adjusted under subsection (a).
- (2) The period described in this paragraph is the period during which administrative or judicial proceedings are pending regarding the alien's right to be admitted or remain in the United States.
- (3) Paragraph (1) and section 204(g) shall not apply with respect to a marriage if the alien establishes by clear and convincing evidence to the satisfaction of the

[Secretary of Homeland Security] that the marriage was entered into in good faith and in accordance with the laws of the place where the marriage took place and the marriage was not entered into for the purpose of procuring the alien's admission as an immigrant and no fee or other consideration was given (other than a fee or other consideration to an attorney for assistance in preparation of a lawful petition) for the filing of a petition under section 204(a) . . . with respect to the alien spouse or alien son or daughter. In accordance with the regulations, there shall be only one level of administrative appellate review for each alien under the previous sentence.

The corresponding regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 245.1(c)(8)(v) states, in pertinent part:

Evidence to establish eligibility for the bona fide marriage exemption. Section 204(g) of the Act provides that certain visa petitions based upon marriages entered into during deportation, exclusion or related judicial proceedings may be approved only if the petitioner provides clear and convincing evidence that the marriage is bona fide. . . .

Facts and Procedural History

The petitioner is a citizen of Mali who entered the United States on April 9, 1998, as a B1 nonimmigrant visitor. On or about January 14, 2003, the petitioner was placed into removal proceedings for remaining in the United States beyond her period of authorized stay. The petitioner was ordered removed and granted withholding of removal on June 2, 2003. The petitioner married a U.S. citizen in Illinois on December 30, 2008. The petitioner filed the instant Form I-360 on April 10, 2012. The director subsequently issued a Request for Evidence (RFE) of, among other things, the petitioner's good-faith entry into the marriage. The petitioner, through counsel, timely responded with additional evidence which the director found insufficient to establish the petitioner's eligibility. The director denied the petition and counsel timely appealed.

On appeal, counsel submits additional affidavits from the petitioner and her friends, as well as a copy of her previous lease and a letter from her prior landlord.

The AAO reviews these proceedings *de novo*. See *Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). On appeal, the petitioner has established that she entered into her marriage in good faith by a preponderance of the evidence, as required for a self-petitioner under section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii) of the Act. However, she has not demonstrated her eligibility for the bona fide marriage exemption from section 204(g) of the Act.

Good-Faith Entry Into Marriage

The director determined that the petitioner's testimony and the testimony submitted on her behalf were insufficient to support a finding of her good-faith entry into the marriage. In her previous affidavits, the petitioner indicated that she met her husband on a bus, and afterwards they talked often. The petitioner met her husband's family and they encouraged them to get married. The petitioner stated that her husband's family was good to her so they decided to marry. They had a simple ceremony in December 2008. The petitioner indicated that her husband was nice and prayed with her, helped her

with the children, and helped around the house. She indicated that she had an abortion but did not tell him about it. In her statement dated May 29, 2013, the petitioner explained that she married her husband because she believes in marriage, and wanted more than a boyfriend. She indicated that they prayed and went to church together and that they had dreams to go to Africa together. The petitioner added that she got pregnant with her husband's child, but had an abortion.

The petitioner also submitted letters from friends. [REDACTED] indicated that the petitioner's husband was caring, helped the children with their homework, and did most of the shopping. [REDACTED] stated generally that she spent time in the petitioner and her husband's household and that she saw them "while they were happy."

On appeal, the petitioner submits another affidavit in which she explains that her husband pointed out an abortion clinic to her but that she actually went to get the abortion on a different occasion. In her statement, [REDACTED] indicated that the petitioner told her that she felt as though she had met her Prince Charming and talked to her about how she fell in love with her husband at first sight. Ms. [REDACTED] felt in her heart that the petitioner married her husband because she was in love with him and wanted to be with him forever. [REDACTED] explains that she believes the petitioner married her husband in good faith, and that the petitioner told her that she "really like[d] this guy." Ms. [REDACTED] indicates that she visited the petitioner and her husband at their home and that they seemed friendly and loving. [REDACTED] states that the petitioner fell in love with her husband quickly and they were married. Ms. [REDACTED] recalled that the petitioner was very happy at first. [REDACTED] states that the petitioner described to her how she met her husband on the bus, and told her they talked every day. Ms. [REDACTED] recalls that she saw the petitioner and her husband together, and that they were in love and got married. She indicates that the petitioner's husband cooked for the petitioner and her children and the petitioner was happy. Counsel also submits a copy of the petitioner and her husband's lease and a letter from their landlord indicating that he rented an apartment to the petitioner and her husband, however, the lease and letter from the landlord show joint residence, which is not disputed, and do not sufficiently establish the petitioner's intentions when entering into the marriage.

De novo review of the record establishes that the petitioner married her spouse in good faith, by a preponderance of the relevant evidence submitted below and on appeal, as required by section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(I)(aa) of the Act.

Section 204(g) of the Act

Nonetheless, the appeal cannot be sustained because the petitioner has not established her eligibility for the bona fide marriage exemption from section 204(g) of the Act. At the time the petitioner married her husband, she was in removal proceedings and had not departed the United States under an order of removal, nor had she resided outside of the United States for the requisite two-year period; thus, she remains subject to the bar at section 204(g) of the Act. 8 C.F.R. §§ 204.2(a)(1)(iii), 245.1(c)(8)(ii)(A). The petitioner did not request an exemption from section 204(g) of the Act in writing, as required by the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(a)(1)(iii)(A) and the present record does not establish the bona fides of her marriage by clear and convincing evidence.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(a)(1)(iii)(B), states, in pertinent part:

(B) *Evidence to establish eligibility for the bona fide marriage exemption.* The petitioner should submit documents which establish that the marriage was entered into in good faith and not entered into for the purpose of procuring the alien's entry as an immigrant. The types of documents the petitioner may submit include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Documentation showing joint ownership of property;
- (2) Lease showing joint tenancy of a common residence;
- (3) Documentation showing commingling of financial resources;
- (4) Birth certificate(s) of child(ren) born to the petitioner and the [abused spouse];
- (5) Affidavits of third parties having knowledge of the bona fides of the marital relationship (Such persons may be required to testify before an immigration officer as to the information contained in the affidavit. Affidavits must be sworn to or affirmed by people who have personal knowledge of the marital relationship. Each affidavit must contain the full name and address, date and place of birth of the person making the affidavit and his or her relationship to the spouses, if any. The affidavit must contain complete information and details explaining how the person acquired his or her knowledge of the marriage. Affidavits should be supported, if possible, by one or more types of documentary evidence listed in this paragraph); or
- (6) Any other documentation which is relevant to establish that the marriage was not entered into in order to evade the immigration laws of the United States.

While identical or similar evidence may be submitted to establish a good faith marriage pursuant to section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(I)(aa) of the Act and the bona fide marriage exemption at section 245(e)(3) of the Act, the latter provision imposes a heightened burden of proof. *Matter of Arthur*, 20 I&N Dec. 475, 478 (BIA 1992). *See also Pritchett v. I.N.S.*, 993 F.2d 80, 85 (5th Cir. 1993) (acknowledging "clear and convincing evidence" as an "exacting standard.") To demonstrate eligibility under section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(I)(aa) of the Act, the petitioner must establish his or her good-faith entry into the qualifying relationship by a preponderance of the evidence and any credible evidence shall be considered. Section 204(a)(1)(J) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(J); *Matter of Chawathe*, 25 I&N Dec. 369, 375 (AAO 2010). However, to be eligible for the bona fide marriage exemption under section 245(e)(3) of the Act, the petitioner must establish his or her good-faith entry into the marriage by clear and convincing evidence. Section 245(e)(3) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1255(e)(3); 8 C.F.R. § 245.1(c)(9)(v). "Clear and convincing evidence" is a more stringent standard. *Arthur*, 20 I&N Dec. at 478.

While the petitioner established her good-faith entry into her marriage by a preponderance of the evidence under section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(I)(aa) of the Act, she has not provided clear and convincing evidence that her marriage is bona fide under the heightened standard of proof required by section 245(e)(3) of the Act, as the testimony of the petitioner and her friends fails to provide clear and convincing evidence of the bona fides of the petitioner's marriage, as prescribed by the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(a)(1)(iii)(B)(5). Although the petitioner explained her lack of documentation of shared assets, she did not submit any further, secondary evidence from third parties or any further detailed and probative testimony regarding their wedding ceremony and shared experiences while they were dating and after their marriage. The present record does not establish her eligibility for the bona fide marriage exemption from the bar to approval of this petition under section 204(g) of the Act.

On appeal, counsel contends that the director did not give proper weight to the evidence under the "any credible evidence standard" for battered spouse petitions. For self-petitioning abused spouses and children, the Act prescribes an evidentiary standard, which mandates that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) "shall consider any credible evidence relevant to the petition." Section 204(a)(1)(J) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(J). *See also* 8 C.F.R. §§ 103.2(b)(2)(iii); 204.2(c)(2)(i). This evidentiary standard is not equivalent to the petitioner's burden of proof. When determining whether or not the petitioner has met his or her burden of proof, USCIS shall consider any relevant, credible evidence. However, "the determination of what evidence is credible and the weight to be given that evidence shall be within the [agency's] sole discretion." Section 204(a)(1)(J) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(J); 8 C.F.R. §§ 103.2(b)(2)(iii); 204.2(c)(2)(i). Accordingly, the mere submission of evidence that is relevant may not always suffice to establish the petitioner's credibility or meet the petitioner's burden of proof.

Here, there is no indication that the director required the petitioner to submit a certain type of document or did not consider all of the evidence. *See* Brief on Appeal at 6. The documents listed in the RFE that can be used to show good-faith entry into marriage are not requirements, but rather, as stated in the RFE, examples of what evidence of a good faith marriage might include, without being limited to said list. The lease, though relevant, does not provide sufficient evidence of the petitioner's intentions in entering into the marriage. The petitioner's friends affidavits submitted on appeal discuss the petitioner's relationship, but do not provide any particular examples of their observations of the petitioner's and her husband's interactions, and are based largely on what the petitioner told them. Overall, the petitioner failed to meet the clear and convincing standard that she entered into her marriage in good faith as required under section 204(g) of the Act.

Eligibility for Immediate Relative Classification

Beyond the director's decision,¹ because the petitioner is not exempt from and has not complied with section 204(g) of the Act, she is also ineligible for immediate relative classification, as required by

¹ A 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*

section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(II)(cc) of the Act and as explicated in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(c)(1)(iv).

Conclusion

On appeal, the petitioner has established by a preponderance of the evidence that she entered into her marriage with her husband in good faith, but remains ineligible pursuant to section 204(g) of the Act. The petitioner has not demonstrated her eligibility for the exemption from that bar at section 245(e)(3) of the Act. The petitioner has also not established her eligibility for immigrant classification as required by section 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(II)(cc) of the Act and as explicated in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.2(c)(1)(iv).

In these proceedings, the petitioner bears the burden of proof to establish her eligibility by a preponderance of the evidence. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361; *Matter of Otiende*, 26 I&N Dec. 127, 128 (BIA 2013). Here, that burden has not been met. Accordingly, the appeal will be dismissed

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.