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FILE: [REDACTED] Office: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER Date: **JUL 25 2008**
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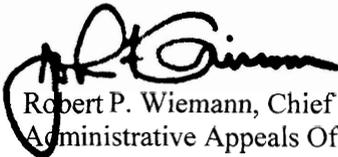
IN RE: Petitioner: [REDACTED]
Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

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:

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 Director, Texas Service Center, issued a notice of intent to deny the petition. The director ultimately denied the Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker (Form I-140). The matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The nature of the petitioner's business is a restaurant. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a specialty cook - Italian. 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. The director denied the petition accordingly.

The record demonstrated that the appeal was properly filed, timely and made 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 denial dated December 27, 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 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 Application for Alien Employment Certification, was accepted for processing by any office within the employment system of DOL. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d). The petitioner must also demonstrate that, on the priority date, the beneficiary had the qualifications stated on its Form ETA 750 Application for Alien Employment Certification certified by DOL and submitted with the instant petition. *Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N Dec. 158 (Act. Reg. Comm. 1977).

Here, the Form ETA 750 was accepted on April 30, 2001.¹ The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$12.50 per hour (\$26,000.00 per year). The Form ETA 750 states that the position requires two years of experience in the proffered position.

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.²

Relevant evidence in the record includes copies of the following documents: the original Form ETA 750, Application for Alien Employment Certification, approved by the U.S. Department of Labor; the petitioner's U.S. Internal Revenue Service Form 1120S tax return for 2005 and, copies of documentation concerning the beneficiary's qualifications as well as other documentation.

The evidence in the record of proceeding shows that the petitioner is structured as a sole proprietorship and converted to an S corporation in 2005. On the petition, the petitioner claimed to have been established in 2000 and to currently employ six workers. According to the tax returns in the record, the petitioner's fiscal year is based on a calendar year. The gross annual income stated on the petition was \$304,000.00. On the Form ETA 750 signed by the beneficiary on April 21, 2001, the beneficiary did claim to have worked for the petitioner since September 2000.

On appeal, counsel asserts that an amended tax return (Form 1120S) for 2005, a letter from [REDACTED] dated January 25, 2007, and copies of U.S. Internal Revenue Service Form 1040 returns for 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 show the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.³

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, Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) requires the petitioner to demonstrate financial resources sufficient to pay the beneficiary's proffered wages,

¹ It has been approximately seven years since the Application for Alien Employment Certification has been accepted and the proffered wage established. According to the employer certification that is part of the application, ETA Form 750 Part A, Section 23 b., states "The wage offered equals or exceeds the prevailing wage and I [the employer] guarantee that, if a labor certification is granted, the wage paid to the alien when the alien begins work will equal or exceed the prevailing wage which is applicable at the time the alien begins work."

² The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the CIS 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).

³ Counsel correctly points out that the director's decision incorrectly stated that the offered job was a landscape gardener instead of specialty cook - Italian.

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 (BIA 1967).

Sole Proprietorship

The petitioner was a sole proprietorship from 2001 to 2004, a business in which one person operates the business in his or her personal capacity. Black's Law Dictionary 1398 (7th Ed. 1999). Unlike a corporation, a sole proprietorship does not exist as an entity apart from the individual owner. *See Matter of United Investment Group*, 19 I&N Dec. 248, 250 (Comm. 1984). Therefore the sole proprietor's adjusted gross income, assets and personal liabilities are also considered as part of the petitioner's ability to pay. Sole proprietors report income and expenses from their businesses on their individual (Form 1040) federal tax return each year. The business-related income and expenses are reported on Schedule C and are carried forward to the first page of the tax return. Sole proprietors must show that they can cover their existing business expenses as well as pay the proffered wage out of their adjusted gross income or other available funds. In addition, sole proprietors must show that they can sustain themselves and their dependents. *Ubeda v. Palmer*, 539 F. Supp. 647 (N.D. Ill. 1982), *aff'd*, 703 F.2d 571 (7th Cir. 1983). The sole proprietors' yearly personal expenses total \$27,785.00 according to the evidence submitted.

In *Ubeda*, 539 F. Supp. at 650, the court concluded that it was highly unlikely that a petitioning entity structured as a sole proprietorship could support himself, his spouse and five dependents on a gross income of slightly more than \$20,000 where the beneficiary's proposed salary was \$6,000 or approximately thirty percent (30%) of the petitioner's gross income.

In the instant case, the sole proprietor supports himself. The Form 1040 tax returns reflect the following information:

	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>
Proprietor's adjusted gross income (Form 1040)	\$ 24,441	\$ 25,423
Petitioner's gross receipts or sales (Schedule C)	\$245,970	\$251,437
Petitioner's wages paid (Schedule C)	\$ -0-	\$ -0-
Petitioner's net profit from business (Schedule C)	\$ 26,299	\$ 27,356
	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
Proprietor's adjusted gross income (Form 1040)	\$ 25,097	\$ 28,355
Petitioner's gross receipts or sales (Schedule C)	\$291,395	\$316,063
Petitioner's wages paid (Schedule C)	\$ 3,850	\$ 40,770
Petitioner's net profit from business (Schedule C)	\$ 27,005	\$ 30,511

In 2001 the sole proprietorship's adjusted gross income of \$24,441.00 failed to cover the proffered wage of \$26,000.00 per year and his personal expenses. It is improbable that the sole proprietor could support himself on <\$1,559.00>⁴ which is what remains after reducing the adjusted gross income by the amount required to pay the proffered wage and still pay personal expenses. In 2002 and 2003, the sole proprietorship's adjusted

⁴ The symbols <a number> indicate a negative number, or in the context of a tax return or other financial statement, a loss.

gross incomes of \$25,423.00 and \$25,097.00 also include a deficiency for those years between payments of the proffered wage and adjusted gross incomes. In 2004, the sole proprietorship's adjusted gross income of \$28,355.00 still failed to cover the proffered wage and the petitioner's personal expenses.

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 the instant case, the petitioner has not established that it employed and paid the beneficiary the full proffered wage from the priority date.

According to counsel the CIS Interoffice Memorandum (HQOPRD 90/16.45) dated May 4, 2004, provides guidance that if the petitioner has employed the beneficiary at the proffered wage, then the eight wage checks paid to the beneficiary or the wages evidenced in the payroll journal are proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. This is correct. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$12.50 per hour (\$26,000.00 per year). The petitioner's payroll journal stated wage payments to the beneficiary from January 1, 2005 to September 30, 2005 amounting to \$19,412.00. In no year has the petitioner paid the beneficiary the proffered wage. There has been sufficient time in this case for counsel to have presented W-2 or 1099-MISC statements for 2001 and onward⁵ evidencing the petitioner's wage payments. Failure to submit requested evidence that precludes a material line of inquiry shall be grounds for denying the petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(14). The non-existence or other unavailability of required evidence creates a presumption of ineligibility. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(2)(i).

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. 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 sales and profits that exceeded the proffered wage is misplaced. Showing that the petitioner's gross sales and profits exceeded the proffered wage is insufficient. Similarly, showing that the petitioner paid wages in excess of the proffered wage is insufficient.

S Corporation

⁵ The beneficiary claimed to have worked for the petitioner since September 2000.

The petitioner's 1120S tax returns⁶ demonstrate the following financial information concerning the petitioner's ability to pay:

- In 2005, the Form 1120S stated net income of \$13,439.00.
- In 2005, the amended Form 1120S stated net income of \$32,143.00.

The evidence submitted does not establish that the petitioner has the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date for years 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004.

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.

⁶ 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 Form 1120S. The instructions on the Form 1120S, U.S. Income Tax Return for an S Corporation, state on page one, "Caution, Include only trade or business income and expenses on lines 1a through 21."

Where an S corporation has income from sources other than from a trade or business, net income is found on Schedule K. The Schedule K form related to the Form 1120S states that an S corporation's total income from its various sources are to be shown not on page one of the Form 1120S, but on Schedule K, Shareholders' Shares of Income, Credits, Deductions, etc. See Internal Revenue Service, Instructions for Form 1120S, 2007, at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1120s.pdf>, (accessed July 24, 2008).