

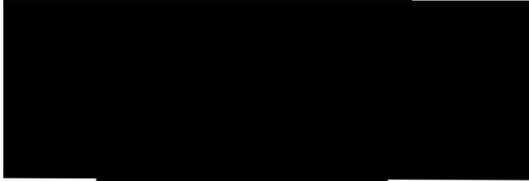
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U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Office of Administrative Appeals MS 2090  
Washington, DC 20529-2090



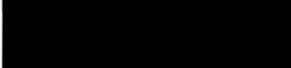
U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
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File:



Office: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER

Date: MAY 05 2009

SRC 05 197 50779

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:



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.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. Please refer to 8 C.F.R. § 103.5 for the specific requirements. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$585. Any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider, as required by 8 C.F.R. 103.5(a)(1)(i).

John F. Grissom  
Acting 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 dismissed.

The petitioner operates an apparel treatment business. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a dry cleaning manager. As required by statute, the petition is accompanied by a Form ETA 750 Application for Alien Employment Certification certified 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, was 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 January 17, 2005, 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 either 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 the DOL. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d). The petitioner must also demonstrate that, on the priority date, the beneficiary had the

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<sup>1</sup> The AAO notes that the Texas Service Center incorrectly dated the director's decision letter January 17, 2005, but it should have been dated January 17, 2006.

qualifications stated on its Form ETA 750 Application for Alien Employment Certification as certified by the 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 March 15, 2001.<sup>2</sup> The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$44,873.00 per year.<sup>3</sup> The Form ETA 750 states that the position requires four 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.<sup>4</sup>

Relevant evidence in the record includes copies of the following documents: the original Form ETA 750 Application for Alien Employment Certification approved by the DOL; the petitioner's U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 1120S tax returns for 2001 to 2004; the petitioner's IRS Form 941 quarterly federal tax returns for three quarters of 2005; the petitioner's owner's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statement for 2002 issued by the petitioner in the amount of \$24,000.00; the petitioner's owner's wife's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statements for 2003 and 2004 issued by the petitioner in the amounts of \$14,900.00 and \$30,600.00 respectively; the petitioner's owner's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statement for 2001 issued by another company in the amount of \$4,600.00; the petitioner's owner's wife's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statement for 2001 issued by a church in the amount of \$10,492.38; the petitioner's owner's IRS Forms 1040 for 2001 to 2004; the petitioner's owner's two daughters' IRS Forms 1040 for 2004; the beneficiary's IRS Forms 1040

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<sup>2</sup> It has been over eight 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, Form ETA 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." However, the petitioner must show in accordance with the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(a)(2) that it can pay the proffered wage from the time of the priority date.

<sup>3</sup> The AAO notes that the proffered wage is \$21.57 per hour.

<sup>4</sup> The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) 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).

for 2003 to 2005; the petitioner's bank statements from 2002 to 2005<sup>5</sup>; a letter dated January 5, 2006 from the petitioner's owner stating that he wishes to break the corporate shield and pay the beneficiary's wages and certifying that [REDACTED] does business as [REDACTED] and documentation concerning the beneficiary's qualifications.

The evidence in the record of proceeding shows that the petitioner is structured as an S corporation. On the petition, the petitioner claimed to have been established in 1999 and to employ four workers currently. According to the tax returns in the record, the petitioner's fiscal year is based on a calendar year. The net annual income and gross annual income stated on the petition were \$8,240.00 and \$153,699.31 respectively. On the Form ETA 750, signed by the beneficiary on February 23, 2001, the beneficiary claimed to have worked for the petitioner since August of 1999.<sup>7</sup>

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of a Form ETA 750 labor certification application establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on the 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> The record of proceeding does not contain a doing business as or fictitious name certificate. A search of the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts' online public inquiry database does not reflect that [REDACTED] has filed a fictitious name certificate. Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Taxable Entity Search, available at <http://ecpa.cpa.state.tx.us/coa/Index.html> (last visited April 20, 2009). The assertions of the petitioning company's owner regarding the company's fictitious name do not constitute evidence. *Matter of Obaighena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980). 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)).

<sup>7</sup> The AAO notes that the petitioner has only submitted evidence regarding the beneficiary's employment since 2003, not since 1999.

offer is realistic, USCIS 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 (BIA 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage during a given period, USCIS will first examine whether the petitioner 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 paid the beneficiary the full proffered wage from the priority date.

Counsel submitted the beneficiary's IRS Forms 1040 for 2003 to 2005. The AAO notes that these Forms 1040 do state that the beneficiary works as a manager and that his wife works as a homemaker, but they do not show that the beneficiary works for the petitioner. Accordingly, the AAO will not consider them as evidence that the petitioner paid the beneficiary the full proffered wage from the priority date as noted above.

If the petitioner does not establish that it paid the beneficiary an amount at least equal to the proffered wage during that period, USCIS 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.

The petitioner's tax returns demonstrate the following financial information concerning the petitioner's ability to pay:

- In 2001, the IRS Form 1120S stated net income of -\$11,908.00.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2002, the IRS Form 1120S stated net income of -\$314.00.
- In 2003, the IRS Form 1120S stated net income of \$406.00.

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<sup>8</sup> The AAO notes that where an S corporation's income is exclusively from a trade or business, USCIS 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."

- In 2004, the IRS Form 1120S stated net income of \$8,240.00.

The petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the proffered wage for 2001 to 2005.

If the net income the petitioner demonstrates it had available during the 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, USCIS 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, USCIS 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>9</sup> A corporation's year-end current assets are shown on Schedule L, lines 1 through 6, of the IRS Form 1120S and include cash-on-hand. 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 during 2001 were \$3,077.00.
- The petitioner's net current assets during 2002 were \$2,815.00.
- The petitioner's net current assets during 2003 were \$2,128.00.
- The petitioner's net current assets during 2004 were \$2,466.00.

Based on the petitioner's net current assets, the petitioner did not have sufficient net current assets to pay the proffered wage for 2001 to 2005.

Accordingly, from the priority date or when the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by the DOL, the petitioner had not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the beneficiary the proffered wage through an examination of wages paid to the beneficiary, its net income, or its net current assets.

On appeal, counsel cites *Far East International Inc*, 93-INA-22 (December 21, 1993) and asserts that USCIS should consider the financial stability and strength of the owner of the corporation, which could make up for "small financial deficiencies," such as a net income less than the proffered

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<sup>9</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.

wage. The AAO notes that the petitioner's financial deficiencies do not appear to be "small" in the instant case.

Counsel asserts that the petitioner's owner's family's tax returns further evidence the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered salary. The petitioner's owner and his wife live in the same household as their two daughters. Counsel has submitted the petitioner's owner's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statement for 2002 issued by the petitioner in the amount of \$24,000.00; the petitioner's owner's wife's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statements for 2003 and 2004 issued by the petitioner in the amounts of \$14,900.00 and \$30,600.00 respectively; the petitioner's owner's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statement for 2001 issued by another company in the amount of \$4,600.00; the petitioner's owner's wife's IRS Form W-2 Wage and Tax Statement for 2001 issued by a church in the amount of \$10,492.38; the petitioner's owner's IRS Forms 1040 for 2001 to 2004; and the petitioner's owner's two daughters' IRS Forms 1040 for 2004.

Contrary to counsel's assertion and the letter from the petitioner's owner, USCIS may not "pierce the corporate veil" and look to the assets of the corporation's owner to satisfy the corporation's ability to pay the proffered wage. It is an elementary rule that a corporation is a separate and distinct legal entity from its owners and shareholders. *See Matter of M*, 8 I&N Dec. 24 (BIA 1958), *Matter of Aphrodite Investments, Ltd.*, 17 I&N Dec. 530 (Comm. 1980), and *Matter of Tessel*, 17 I&N Dec. 631 (Act. Assoc. Comm. 1980). Consequently, assets of its shareholders or of other enterprises or corporations cannot be considered in determining the petitioning corporation's ability to pay the proffered wage. In a similar case, the court in *Sitar v. Ashcroft*, 2003 WL 22203713 (D.Mass. Sept. 18, 2003) stated, "nothing in the governing regulation, 8 C.F.R. § 204.5, permits [USCIS] to consider the financial resources of individuals or entities who have no legal obligation to pay the wage."

Counsel states that a DOL Board of Alien Labor Certification Appeals (BALCA) case is applicable to the instant petition before the AAO. Citing to *Ohsawa America*, 1988-INA-240 (BALCA 1988), counsel states that the petition should be approved as the petitioner has demonstrated its ability to pay. Counsel does not state how this DOL precedent is binding in these proceedings. While 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c) provides that precedent decisions of USCIS are binding on all its employees in the administration of the Act, BALCA 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).

Moreover, counsel also does not state that the BALCA panel in *Ohsawa America* also considered the fact that the petitioning entity showed increased revenue and decreased operating losses in addition to one of its shareholder's willingness to fund the company. In the instant petition, the petitioner has not demonstrated such financial growth. Thus, in addition to not being binding precedent, *Ohsawa America* is distinguishable from the facts of the instant petition.

*Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (BIA 1967), relates to petitions filed during uncharacteristically unprofitable or difficult years but only in a framework of profitable or successful years. The petitioning entity in *Sonogawa* had been in business for over 11 years and routinely earned a gross annual income of about \$100,000. During the year in which the petition was filed in that case, the petitioner changed business locations and paid rent on both the old and new locations

for five months. There were large moving costs and also a period of time when the petitioner was unable to do regular business. The Regional Commissioner determined that the petitioner's prospects for a resumption of successful business operations were well established. The petitioner was a fashion designer whose work had been featured in *Time* and *Look* magazines. Her clients included Miss Universe, movie actresses, and society matrons. The petitioner's clients had been included in the lists of the best-dressed California women. The petitioner lectured on fashion design at design and fashion shows throughout the United States and at colleges and universities in California. The Regional Commissioner's determination in *Sonegawa* was based in part on the petitioner's sound business reputation and outstanding reputation as a couturiere.

No unusual circumstances have been shown to exist in this case to parallel those in *Sonegawa*, nor has it been established that 2001 to 2005 were uncharacteristically unprofitable years for the petitioner. The AAO notes that the petitioner only earned a gross income of \$106,419.00, \$113,209.00, \$149,085.00, and \$153,636.00 respectively from 2001 to 2004, that the petitioner only paid \$50,325.00, \$36,491.00, \$49,622.00, and \$60,080.00 respectively in salaries and wages from 2001 to 2004 for all of its approximately four employees, and that the petitioner did not pay any compensation to officers from 2001 to 2004.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to counsel's assertion on appeal, it does not appear that the petitioner could pay the proffered wage based on the totality of the circumstances.<sup>11</sup>

The evidence submitted fails to establish that the petitioner has 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.

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<sup>10</sup> The AAO notes that gross income is listed on line 1a of the IRS Form 1120S, salaries and wages are listed on line 8, and compensation to officers is listed on line 7.

<sup>11</sup> The AAO notes that counsel cites *O'Conner v. Attorney General*, 1987 WL 18243 (D.Mass.) in his appeal, stating that an employer's entire financial resources must be analyzed in order to make a totality of the circumstances ability to pay determination. The AAO has analyzed the petitioner's financial resources, and it does not appear that the petitioner could pay the proffered wage.