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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
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FILE: [REDACTED]
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Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER

Date: **MAY 06 2009**

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.

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 or reopen, 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, Nebraska Service Center, and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a hospital. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a registered nurse. The petitioner asserts that the beneficiary qualifies for blanket labor certification pursuant to 20 C.F.R. § 656.5, Schedule A, Group I. The director denied the petition as the wage listed on the petitioner's job posting notice failed to comply with the prevailing wage determination requirements of the Department of Labor (DOL).

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 March 9, 2007 denial, the main issue in this case is whether or not the petitioner's job posting notice complied with the DOL's prevailing wage determination requirements.

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. Section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who hold baccalaureate degrees and are members of the professions.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(a)(2) provides that a properly filed Form I-140, must be "accompanied by any required individual labor certification, application for Schedule A designation, or evidence that the alien's occupation qualifies as a shortage occupation within the DOL's Labor Market Information Pilot Program." The priority date of any petition filed for classification under section 203(b) of the Act "shall be the date the completed, signed petition (including all initial evidence and the correct fee) is properly filed with [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)]." 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d). Here, the priority date is May 30, 2006.

The regulatory scheme governing the alien labor certification process contains certain safeguards to assure that petitioning employers do not treat alien workers more favorably than U.S. workers. New DOL regulations concerning labor certifications went into effect on March 28, 2005. The new regulations are referred to by DOL by the acronym PERM. *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 77325, 77326 (Dec. 27, 2004). The PERM regulation was effective as of March 28, 2005, and applies to labor certification applications for the permanent employment of aliens filed on or after that date. As the petitioner filed this matter on May 30, 2006, it was required to submit the job offer on the Form ETA 9089.

The AAO reviews the denial of the petition *de novo*. 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 upon appeal¹. In support of this appeal, counsel submits a brief, additional prevailing wage determinations, and a revised offer of employment. Other relevant evidence in the record includes a Form ETA 9089; a job posting notice; and a prevailing wage determination.

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.15 states in pertinent part:

- (a) *Filing application*. An employer must apply for a labor certification for a *Schedule A* occupation by filing an application in duplicate with the appropriate DHS office, and not with an ETA application processing center.
- (b) *General documentation requirements*. A *Schedule A* application must include:
 - (1) An *Application for Permanent Employment Certification* form, which includes a prevailing wage determination in accordance with § 656.40 and § 656.41.
 - (2) Evidence that notice of filing the Application for Permanent Employment Certification was provided to the bargaining representative or the employer's employees as proscribed in § 656.10(d).

Accordingly, the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.15(b) requires an Application for Permanent Employment Certification form for Schedule A to include a prevailing wage determination (PWD) in accordance with § 656.40 and § 656.41.

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.40(a) states:

Application process. The employer must request a prevailing wage determination from the SWA having jurisdiction over the proposed area of intended employment. The SWA must enter its wage determination on the form it uses and return the form with its endorsement to the employer. Unless the employer chooses to appeal the SWA's prevailing wage determination under Sec. 656.41(a), it files the Application for Permanent Employment Certification either electronically or by mail with an ETA application processing center and maintains the SWA PWD in its files. The determination shall be submitted to an ETA application processing center in the event it is requested in the course of an audit.

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).

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.40(c) states:

Validity period. The SWA must specify the validity period of the prevailing wage, which in no event may be less than 90 days or more than 1 year from the determination date. To use a SWA PWD, employers must file their applications or begin the recruitment required by §§ 656.17(d) or 656.21 within the validity period specified by the SWA.

In the instant case, the record includes a PWD dated May 18, 2006. The AAO finds that the petitioner has complied with the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.15(b) which requires an Application for Permanent Employment Certification form for Schedule A to include a prevailing wage determination in accordance with § 656.40 and § 656.41.

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10(d)(1) provides in relevant part:

In applications filed under §§ 656.15 (Schedule A), 656.16 (Shepherders), . . . the employer must give notice of the filing of the Application for Permanent Employment Certification and be able to document that notice was provided, if requested by the Certifying Officer, as follows:

(i) To the bargaining representative(s) (if any) of the employer's employees

(ii) If there is no such bargaining representative, by posted notice to the employer's employees at the facility or location of the employment. The notice must be posted for at least 10 consecutive business days. The notice must be clearly visible and unobstructed while posted and must be posted in conspicuous places where the employer's U.S. workers can readily read the posted notice on their way to or from their place of employment. Appropriate locations for posting notices of the job opportunity include locations in the immediate vicinity of the wage and hour notices required by 29 CFR 516.4 or occupational safety and health notices required by 29 CFR 1903.2(a). In addition, the employer must publish the notice in any and all in-house media, whether electronic or printed, in accordance with the normal procedures used for the recruitment of similar positions in the employer's organization. The documentation requirement may be satisfied by providing a copy of the posted notice and stating where it was posted, and by providing copies of all the in-house media, whether electronic or print, that were used to distribute notice of the application in accordance with the procedures used for similar positions within the employer's organization.

The AAO notes that the PWD dated May 18, 2006 states that the prevailing wage is \$65,187.00 for a registered nurse. According to the ETA 9089 signed by the petitioner on May 2, 2006, the proffered wage is \$29.00 per hour (\$60,320.00 a year). Counsel asserts that prevailing wage determinations have been made for the exact same job description as a registered nurse for \$44,450.00 and

\$40,040.00 per year. In support of his assertions, he submits PWDs for these amounts from the Texas Workforce Commission with expiration dates of June 20, 2007. While the AAO acknowledges this documentation, it notes that the PWD listing the prevailing wage to be \$40,040.00 was submitted for Memorial Hermann Healthcare System, not for the petitioner. Furthermore, the ETA 9089 submitted by the petitioner with its Form I-140 uses the PWD that lists the prevailing wage to be \$65,187.00. The AAO thus finds that the Form I-140 petition is not accompanied by a proper application for labor certification because the proffered wage in the Form ETA 9089 is less than the prevailing wage in the PWD submitted.

Counsel further asserts that the FLC wage determination printed from DOL's website shows a prevailing wage of \$44,450.00 per year. He notes that this amount is clearly within the range of the salary offered to the beneficiary of \$29.00 per hour. While the AAO acknowledges counsel's assertions, it notes that the plain language of 20 C.F.R. § 656.40 states that the employer must request a PWD from the SWA having jurisdiction over the proposed area of intended employment. There is nothing in the regulation that allows substitution of a FLC wage information printed from the DOL's website for a SWA wage determination issued for a specific case. As such, the AAO finds counsel's assertions to be without merit as the FLC printout from the DOL website does not constitute a PWD made by the SWA.

According to the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10(d)(3):

The notice of the filing of an Application for Permanent Employment Certification must:

- i. State the notice is being provided as a result of the filing of an application for permanent alien labor certification for the relevant job opportunity;
- ii. State any person may provide documentary evidence bearing on the application to the Certifying Officer of the Department of Labor;
- iii. Provide the address of the appropriate Certifying Officer; and
- iv. Be provided between 30 and 180 days before filing the application.

According to the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10(d)(6):

If an application is filed under the Schedule A procedures at Sec. 656.15, or the procedures for shepherders at Sec. 656.16, the notice must contain a description of the job and rate of pay, and must meet the requirements of this section.

The wage listed on the posting notice must comply with 20 C.F.R. § 656.40. In this case, the record reflects that the job notice posted on March 15, 2006 also states the rate of pay to be \$29.00 an hour. As such, the petitioner did not list the proper wage on the posting notice.

Further, the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10(d)(1)(ii) requires that the employer must publish the notice in any and all in-house media, whether electronic or printed, in accordance with the normal procedures used for the recruitment of similar positions in the employer's organization. The AAO notes that the job posting notice makes no mention of publication in any and all in-house media. As such, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not complied with the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10(d)(1)(ii). The AAO also notes that the petitioner has failed to provide the address of the appropriate Certifying Officer and has therefore not complied with the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10(d)(3).

Accordingly, the petitioner has failed to submit a valid Form ETA 9089 or provide the proper posting notice as required by the regulations, and the petition may not be approved for these reasons.

Beyond the director's decision, the AAO notes that an additional 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. 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 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. 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.

The petitioner must demonstrate the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, which is the date the Form ETA 9089, 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 qualifications stated on its Form ETA 9089, 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).

The prevailing wage as stated on the Form ETA 9089 is \$65,187.00 per year. The Form ETA 9089 states that the position requires an associate's degree.

The petitioner is a hospital. On the Form I-140 petition, the petitioner claimed to have been established in 1998 and to currently employ over 705 workers. However, the record does not contain a statement from a "financial officer" establishing an ability to pay. The human resources director does not appear to be a financial officer. There are no tax records submitted into the record. The petitioner does not state its gross annual income or net annual income. On the Form ETA 9089, signed by the beneficiary on May 2, 2006, the beneficiary does not claim to have worked for the petitioner.

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of an ETA 9089 labor certification application establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on the ETA 9089, 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, 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 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage during a given period in the absence of a statement from a financial officer establishing an ability to pay, USCIS 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 beneficiary does not claim to have worked for the petitioner. As such, the petitioner has not established by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to or greater than the proffered wage.

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, USCIS will next examine the net income figures reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax returns, 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); *Ubada 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 and wage expense 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.

In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. at 1084, the court held that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now USCIS, 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. [USCIS] 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* at 537.

The AAO notes that the record fails to include any tax returns for the petitioner. As such, the petitioner has not established that it has the 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, USCIS will review the petitioner's assets. We reject, however, the idea the petitioner's total assets should have been considered in the determination of the ability to pay the proffered wage. 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.² As previously noted, the record fails to include any tax returns for the petitioner. Therefore, the petitioner has not demonstrated that it has sufficient net current assets to pay the proffered wage.

²According 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 accounts payable, short-term notes payable, and accrued expenses (such as taxes and

Thus, the petitioner has not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the beneficiary the proffered wage through an examination of wages paid to the beneficiary, or its net income or net current assets.

Although USCIS will not consider gross income without also considering the expenses that were incurred to generate that income, the overall magnitude of the entity's business activities should be considered when the entity's ability to pay is marginal or borderline. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967). While the petitioner states on the Form I-140 that it was established in 1998 and employs over 705 employees, the AAO notes that the record does not include any documentary evidence, such as tax statements for the petitioner, to support its gross or net annual income. Thus, assessing the totality of circumstances in this individual case, it is concluded that the petitioner has not proven its financial strength and viability and has the ability to pay the proffered wage.

The petition will be denied for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for denial. In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

The denial of this petition is without prejudice to the filing of a new petition by the petitioner accompanied by the appropriate supporting evidence and fee.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.