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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office (AAO)
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**



B6

FEB 28 2011

FILE:



Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER

Date:

IN RE:

Petitioner:

Beneficiary:



PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as an Other Worker pursuant to Section 203(b)(3)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied by us in reaching our decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. The specific requirements for filing such a request can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. 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 \$630. Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires that any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you,

Elizabeth McCormack

Perry Rhew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The preference visa petition was denied by the Director, Nebraska Service Center. In a subsequent motion to reopen, the director affirmed his previous decision. The matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a manufacturing company. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a machine operator. As required by statute, the petition is accompanied by a Form ETA 750, Application for Alien Employment Certification, approved by the United States 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 also determined that the labor certification application submitted with the petition does not support an unskilled or other worker position. The director 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 the decision. Further elaboration of the procedural history will be made only as necessary.

As set forth in the director's April 13, 2009 denial, the issues in this case are 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; and whether the petitioner has established that the labor certification submitted with the petition supports the I-140 category requested.

Section 203(b)(3)(A)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)(iii), 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 unskilled labor, not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States.

Here, the Form I-140 was filed on July 30, 2007. On Part 2.g. of the Form I-140, the petitioner indicated that it was filing the petition for any other worker (requiring less than two years of training or experience).

The AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis. See *Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). The AAO considers all pertinent evidence in the record, including new evidence properly submitted upon appeal.¹

On appeal, counsel submits additional evidence to establish its ability to pay the proffered wage and an amended Form I-140 showing the corrected box "e" instead of box "g" originally marked. Counsel claims that due to a clerical oversight box "g" of Part 2 of the first page of the submitted

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).

Form I-140 was incorrectly marked thus making this choice inconsistent with the previously granted labor certification training and experience requirements.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(i) provides in pertinent part:

(4) Differentiating between skilled and other workers. The determination of whether a worker is a skilled or other worker will be based on the requirements of training and/or experience placed on the job by the prospective employer, as certified by the Department of Labor.

In this case, the labor certification Form ETA 750 indicates that six months of on-the-job training and two years of experience are required to perform satisfactorily the job duties of the proffered position. However, the petitioner requested the other worker classification on the Form I-140. There is no provision in statute or regulation that compels United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to readjudicate a petition under a different visa classification once the decision has been rendered. A petitioner may not make material changes to a petition in an effort to make a deficient petition conform to USCIS requirements. *See Matter of Izummi*, 22 I&N Dec. 169, 176 (Assoc. Comm. 1988).

The director also found that the petitioner has not established its ability to pay the proffered wage as of the priority date and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence.

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 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).

The evidence in the record of proceeding shows that the petitioner is structured as a limited liability

company (LLC) and filed its tax returns on IRS Form 1065.² On the petition, the petitioner claimed to have been established on April 5, 1995 and to currently employ 68 workers. The Form ETA 750 was accepted on December 4, 2001. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$14.75 per hour which equates to \$30,680 per year based on a 40-hour week.

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, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (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 Sonegawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage during a given period, 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 petitioner provided the beneficiary's 2005 Form W-2 showing that it paid the beneficiary \$32,247.26 in wages for that year. The petitioner only provided Form W-2 for the year 2005. Accordingly, the petitioner has established that it employed and paid the beneficiary the full proffered wage for the year 2005. The petitioner must show that it can pay the proffered wage for the years 2001 and onwards.

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 figure reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses. *River Street Donuts, LLC v. Napolitano*, 558 F.3d 111 (1st Cir. 2009); *Taco Especial v. Napolitano*, 696 F. Supp. 2d. 813, 881 (E.D. Mich. 2010). 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

² A limited liability company is an entity formed under state law by filing articles of organization. An LLC may be classified for federal income tax purposes as if it were a sole proprietorship, a partnership or a corporation. If the LLC has only one owner, it will automatically be treated as a sole proprietorship unless an election is made to be treated as a corporation. If the LLC has two or more owners, it will automatically be considered to be a partnership unless an election is made to be treated as a corporation. If the LLC does not elect its classification, a default classification of partnership (multi-member LLC) or disregarded entity (taxed as if it were a sole proprietorship) will apply. See 26 C.F.R. § 301.7701-3. The election referred to is made using IRS Form 8832, Entity Classification Election. In the instant case, the petitioner stated on Schedule B of its federal tax return that it is a domestic limited liability company for federal tax purposes.

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 receipts and wage expense is misplaced. Showing that the petitioner's gross receipts 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 USCIS should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income. See *Taco Especial v. Napolitano*, 696 F. Supp. 2d at 881 (gross profits overstate an employer's ability to pay because it ignores other necessary expenses).

With respect to depreciation, the court in *River Street Donuts* noted:

The AAO recognized that a depreciation deduction is a systematic allocation of the cost of a tangible long-term asset and does not represent a specific cash expenditure during the year claimed. Furthermore, the AAO indicated that the allocation of the depreciation of a long-term asset could be spread out over the years or concentrated into a few depending on the petitioner's choice of accounting and depreciation methods. Nonetheless, the AAO explained that depreciation represents an actual cost of doing business, which could represent either the diminution in value of buildings and equipment or the accumulation of funds necessary to replace perishable equipment and buildings. Accordingly, the AAO stressed that even though amounts deducted for depreciation do not represent current use of cash, neither does it represent amounts available to pay wages.

We find that the AAO has a rational explanation for its policy of not adding depreciation back to net income. Namely, that the amount spent on a long term tangible asset is a "real" expense.

River Street Donuts at 118. "[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." *Chi-Feng Chang* at 537 (emphasis added).

The record before the director closed on July 30, 2007 with the filing of Form I-140. As of that date, the petitioner's 2007 tax return was not yet due; therefore, the petitioner's 2006 federal income tax return is the most recent return available. The petitioner provided its Forms 1065, U.S. Return of Partnership Income for the years 2001 and 2005. In 2001, the petitioner's Form 1065 stated net

income of -\$97,924.³ The petitioner has not established its ability to pay the proffered wage of \$30,680 from its net income in 2001. The petitioner has not established its ability to pay the proffered wage from the priority date, December 4, 2001 and onwards.

USCIS records indicate that the petitioner has filed 10 Form I-140 petitions, of which seven were approved, two were denied and one was rejected, including the instant petition. The petitioner would need to demonstrate its ability to pay the sponsored worker's proffered wages for each I-140 beneficiary, including the instant beneficiary, from the respective priority date until each respective beneficiary obtains permanent residence, or until the respective Form I-140 is denied. See 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2).

As an alternate means of determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage, USCIS may review the petitioner's net current assets. Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner's current assets and current liabilities. 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 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. In 2001, the petitioner's Form 1065 stated net current assets of -\$782,782. Therefore, the petitioner's net current assets would be deficient to pay the proffered salary of \$30,680 in 2001.

The petitioner provided copies of the petitioner's financial statements for 2000 through 2007 accompanied by a statement indicating that the financial statements are audited. However, the financial statements contain neither the name nor the signature of the certified public accountant (CPA) performing the audit and attesting to the audit performed and the opinion expressed by the auditor. Audited financial statements represent a CPA's highest level of assurance services. In an audit, the CPA performs verification and substantiation procedures that may include direct correspondence with creditors or debtors to verify details of amounts owed, physical inspection of inventories or investment securities, inspection of minutes and contracts, and other similar steps. The CPA gains a knowledge and understanding of the entity's system of internal control. When the audit is completed, the CPA's standard audit report states that an audit was performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, and expresses an opinion that the financial statements present fairly the entity's financial position and results of operations. The CPA also provides an opinion or disclaimer of opinion as to whether the financial statements are presented in accordance

³ For a partnership, where a partnership's income is exclusively from a trade or business, USCIS considers net income to be the figure shown on Line 22 of the Form 1065, U.S. Return of Partnership Income. However, where a partnership 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 or additional credits, deductions or other adjustments, net income is found on page 4 of IRS Form 1065 at line 1 of the Analysis of Net Income (Loss) of Schedule K. In the instant case, the petitioner's Schedule K has a relevant entry in 2001; therefore, its net income is found on page 4 of IRS Form 1065 at line 1 of the Analysis of Net Income (Loss) for that year.

with GAAP. Without the signature of a licensed CPA, the AAO cannot conclude that the financial statements in this case are audited.

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. 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. In the instant case, the reliability of the financial statements has not been established, and they are insufficient to demonstrate the ability to pay the proffered wage.

On appeal, counsel cites an unpublished decision from the Vermont Service Center. This unpublished decision is not binding in this proceeding. 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, unpublished 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).

USCIS may consider the overall magnitude of the petitioner's business activities in its determination of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (BIA 1967). 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 *Sonogawa* was based in part on the petitioner's sound business reputation and outstanding reputation as a couturiere. As in *Sonogawa*, USCIS may, at its discretion, consider evidence relevant to the petitioner's financial ability that falls outside of a petitioner's net income and net current assets. USCIS may consider such factors as the number of years 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 USCIS deems relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.

In the instant case, the petitioner must demonstrate that it can pay the proffered wage from the respective priority date until the beneficiary obtains permanent residence. The petitioner's tax returns reflect on Schedule B that the petitioning entity is a domestic limited liability company for federal tax purposes. An LLC, like a corporation, is a legal entity separate and distinct from its owners. The assets of its owners cannot be considered in determining the petitioning entity's ability to pay the proffered wage. *See Matter of Aphrodite Investments, Ltd.*, 17 I&N Dec. 530 (Comm.

1980). The debts and obligations of the company generally are not the debts and obligations of the owners or anyone else.⁴ An investor's liability is limited to his or her initial investment. As the owners and others only are liable to their initial investment, the total income and assets of the owners and others, and their ability, if they wished, to pay the company's debts and obligations, cannot be utilized to demonstrate the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must show the ability to pay the proffered wage out of its own funds.

In the instant case, the petition indicates that the petitioner has been in business for over 15 years and employs 68 individuals. The petitioner provided its 2001 and 2005 federal returns with stated income of -\$97,924 and \$154,588, respectively. In contrast, the unaudited financial returns states that in 2001 and 2005, the petitioner's net income was -\$241,611 and -\$515, respectively. Although 2005 was a prosperous year, the petitioner's tax return shows negative net income in 2001. 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). In the instant case, the petitioner has not provided its historical growth, its reputation within the industry, a prospectus of its future business ventures or any other evidence to demonstrate its ability to pay the proffered wage. Nor has the petitioner shown that unusual or extraordinary circumstances prevented it from paying the proffered wage in the relevant years.

Thus, assessing the totality of the circumstances in this individual case, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not demonstrated through the overall magnitude of its business activities that it has the continuing ability to pay the beneficiary's proffered wage and all of its sponsored workers. Further, the petition cannot be approved because the labor certification application submitted with the petition does not support an unskilled or other worker position

The appeal will be dismissed and the petition will be denied for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an alternative basis for dismissal. 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.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.

⁴ Although this general rule might be amenable to alteration pursuant to contract or otherwise, no evidence appears in the record to indicate that the general rule is inapplicable in the instant case.