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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

[Redacted]

DATE **OCT 10 2012**

OFFICE: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER

FILE [Redacted]

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:

[Redacted]

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 AAO inappropriately applied the law in reaching its decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen in accordance with the instructions on Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$630. The specific requirements for filing such a motion can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. **Do not file any motion directly with the AAO.** Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires any motion to be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you,

Kenneth R. Rhew for

Perry Rhew
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 is a Japanese Restaurant. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a Japanese Chef. 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 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 July 22, 2009 denial, at 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.

Evidence of the Petitioner's Ability to Pay the Proffered Wage

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 (Acting Reg'l Comm'r 1977).

Here, the Form ETA 750 was accepted on August 5, 2003. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$2,500 per month (\$30,000 per year). The Form ETA 750 states that the position requires two years of experience in the related occupation of cook, and three years of high school education.

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

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 on June 30, 2003, to employ five workers, to have a gross annual income of \$173,487 and to have a net annual income of \$16,467. According to the tax returns in the record, the petitioner's fiscal year is based on a calendar year. On the Form ETA 750B, signed by the beneficiary on July 31, 2003, the beneficiary did 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 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'l Comm'r 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'l Comm'r 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. The following chart reflects wages the petitioner paid to the beneficiary as shown on IRS Forms W-2.

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).

Tax Year	Wage Paid from Form W-2
2003	No evidence
2004	No evidence
2005	No evidence
2006	No evidence
2007	\$6,000
2008	\$35,400

Thus, in 2008 the petitioner paid the beneficiary in excess of the proffered wage. From 2003 through 2007 the petitioner did not pay the beneficiary the proffered wage. The petitioner must establish that it can pay the full proffered wage in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, and the difference of \$24,000 between the wages paid and the proffered wage in 2007.

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 873 (E.D. Mich. 2010), *aff'd*, No. 10-1517 (6th Cir. filed Nov. 10, 2011). 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 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 petitioner’s tax returns demonstrate its net income² as shown in the table below.

Tax Year	Net Income as Reflected on Form 1120S
2003	\$3,923
2004	\$13,046
2005	\$14,186
2006	\$16,467
2007	\$6,473

² 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 IRS Form 1120S. However, where an S corporation 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, credits, deductions or other adjustments, net income is found on line 23 (2003) line 17e (2004-2005) line 1 8 (2006-2008) of Schedule K. *See* Instructions for Form 1120S, at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1120s.pdf> (accessed September 1, 2012) (indicating that Schedule K is a summary schedule of all shareholders’ shares of the corporation’s income, deductions, credits, etc.). Because the petitioner had an additional deduction shown on its Schedule K for 2007, the petitioner’s net income is found on Schedule K of its 2007 tax return. In 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, the petitioner’s net income is shown on line 21 of page one of Form 1120S.

Therefore, for the years 2003 through 2006, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the proffered wage. In 2007, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the difference between the proffered wage and the wage paid.³

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.⁴ 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. The petitioner's tax returns demonstrate its end-of-year net current assets as shown in the table below.

Tax Year	Current Assets	Current Liabilities	Calculation of Net Current Assets
2003	\$8,408	\$28,210	-\$19,802
2004	\$7,619	\$10,670	-\$3,051
2005	\$16,303	\$3,382	\$12,921
2006	\$33,493	\$196	\$33,297
2007	\$43,887	\$3,601	\$40,286

Therefore, in 2006 the petitioner had sufficient net current assets to pay the proffered wage. In 2007, the petitioner had sufficient net current assets to pay the difference between the proffered wage and the wage paid to the beneficiary. However, in 2003, 2004 and 2005, the petitioner did not have sufficient net current assets to pay the proffered wage.

Therefore, from the date 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 as of the priority date through an examination of wages paid to the beneficiary, or its net income or net current assets.

On appeal, counsel asserts that USCIS should consider the personal assets of the petitioner's shareholders. Counsel references the petitioner's May 6, 2003 articles of incorporation that indicate that the petitioner is a "close corporation." Also submitted are August 10, 2009 affidavits from the

³ The director incorrectly stated that the petitioner's net income in 2007 as "\$561,00."

⁴ According 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 salaries). *Id.* at 118.

petitioner's shareholders indicating that they are willing to pay the beneficiary's salary from their own personal assets. In support of this assertion counsel submits the shareholders' individual tax returns.

Also on appeal, counsel references two cases cited in the director's decision, *Matter of M*, 8 I&N Dec. 24 (BIA 1958), and *Matter of Aphrodite Investments, Ltd.*, 17 I&N Dec. 530 (Comm'r 1980). Counsel states, "...neither of these cases hold that a shareholder's assets can never be considered in determining a corporation's ability to pay the proffered wage." Counsel correctly notes that the primary issue in these two cases is whether a shareholder may be considered an employee of a company and therefore, qualify as a beneficiary of a visa petition. However, *Matter of M*, states the following at pages 50-51:

It is an elementary rule that a corporation is a legal entity entirely separate and distinct from its stockholders, and this is true even though one person may own all or nearly all of the capital stock (*Dalton v. Bowers*; 287 U.S. 404, 408, 410 (1932); *51 *Cannon Manufacturing Co. v. Cudahy Packing Co.*, 267 U.S. 333 (1925); *Haese v. A.R. Demory Investment Co.*, 38 F.2d 232 (C.C.A. 9, 1930), cert. den. 282 U.S. 840). The fact that one person owns a majority or all of the stock in a corporation does not, of itself, make him liable for the debts of the corporation, and this rule applies even where an individual incorporated his business for the sole purpose of escaping individual liability for corporation debts. 18 C.J.S. Corporations § 581. In *United States v. Weissman*, 219 F.2d 837 (C.A. 2, 1955), *Weissman*, the defendant, was the sole owner of a number of corporations and was the only person financially interested in any of them. The court held that there could be legal transactions between two of Weissman's corporations and that the same obligations would arise as if they had been between either corporation and a third person.

Additionally, *Matter of Aphrodite Investments, Ltd.*, cites to *Matter of M*, stating that "precedent was established which held that the sole stockholder of a corporation was able to be employed by that corporation as the corporation has a separate legal entity from its owners or even its sole owner." *Matter of Aphrodite Investments, Ltd.*, 17 I&N Dec. at 531.

Regardless of the topic primarily at issue in the two cases, they both state that a corporation is a separate and distinct legal entity from its owners and shareholders.

Additionally, counsel references *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988), highlighting the following section regarding capital at risk:

Even though the petitioner owns only half of the authorized shares in King's Wheel, he is the sole shareholder thus far. He is also the only officer of the corporation. As such, the petitioner exercises sole control over the corporation's activities; whether the business proceeds according to plan or whether, for example, the business returns the petitioner's money is the petitioner's decision alone. Therefore, the petitioner cannot meet his at-risk requirement by merely depositing funds into a corporate account.

Counsel asserts that the above supports a finding that "...when dealing with a corporation with a sole shareholder, there are no barriers in limiting the flow of money from the shareholder to the corporation and from the corporation to the shareholder."

Counsel's argument is not persuasive. 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."

Additionally on appeal, counsel submits several of the petitioner's bank statements, as well as a July 31, 2009 statement from the petitioner's bank indicating that bank statements are only available going back five years. Counsel's reliance on the balances in the petitioner's bank account 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 returns, such as the petitioner's taxable income (income minus deductions) or the cash specified on Schedule L that was considered above in determining the petitioner's net current assets.

Counsel's assertions on appeal cannot be concluded to outweigh the evidence presented in the tax returns as submitted by the petitioner that demonstrates that the petitioner could not pay the proffered wage from the day the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by the DOL.

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 (Reg'l Comm'r 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 paid nominal salaries and wages and had minimal gross receipts in each relevant year. It filed the labor certification just three months after its incorporation. The petitioner did not establish the historical growth of its business, the occurrence of any uncharacteristic business expenditures or losses, or its reputation within its industry. Thus, assessing the totality of the circumstances in this individual case, it is concluded that the petitioner has not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage.

The evidence submitted does not establish that the petitioner had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date.

Evidence of the Beneficiary's Qualifications

Beyond the decision of the director, the petitioner must demonstrate that the beneficiary possessed all of the requirements stated on the labor certification as of the August 5, 2003 priority date. *See Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N Dec. 158 (Acting Reg'l Comm'r 1977).

In the instant case, the labor certification states that the offered position requires two years of experience in the related occupation of cook. On the labor certification, the beneficiary claims to qualify for the offered position based on experience as a Japanese Chef at [REDACTED] from January 1996 through December 1998.

The beneficiary's claimed qualifying experience must be supported by letters from employers giving the name, address, and title of the employer, and a description of the beneficiary's experience. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(A). The record contains a certificate of employment and accompanying translation from [REDACTED] President of [REDACTED] from January 12, 1996 through December 23, 1998. This certificate states that the beneficiary was employed as "a manager (cook of raw fish)." However, the certificate does not contain an adequate description of her duties. It is not clear that she worked full-time as a cook for the requisite two-year period; instead, it appears that she served as a restaurant manager at [REDACTED]

The evidence in the record does not establish that the beneficiary possessed the required experience set forth on the labor certification by the priority date. Therefore, the petitioner has also failed to establish that the beneficiary is qualified for the offered position.

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*, 229 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1043 (E.D.

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Cal. 2001), *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004) (noting that the AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis).

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.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.