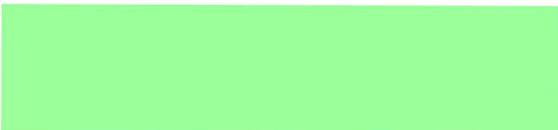


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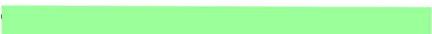
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Administrative Appeals Office (AAO)  
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090  
Washington, DC 20529-2090



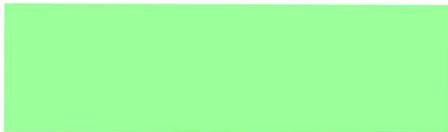
U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services



DATE: **MAR 18 2013** OFFICE: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER FILE: 

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:

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,



Ron Rosenberg  
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 preschool and kindergarten facility. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a kindergarten teacher. As required by statute, the petition is accompanied by an ETA Form 9089, Application for Permanent 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 and 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 September 27, 2009 denial, the single issue in this case is whether or not the petitioner has the ability to pay the proffered wage as of the priority date and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence.

Section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)(i), provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing skilled labor (requiring at least two years training or experience), not of a temporary nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States.

The regulation 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 ETA Form 9089, Application for Permanent 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 ETA Form 9089, Application for Permanent 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 ETA Form 9089 was accepted on February 11, 2008. The proffered wage as stated on the ETA Form 9089 is \$35,380 per year. The ETA Form 9089 states that the position requires a bachelor's degree in education and 24 months experience in the position offered as a kindergarten teacher.

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.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence in the record of proceeding shows that the petitioner is structured as a sole proprietorship. On the petition, the petitioner claimed to have been established in 2000 and to currently employ 4 workers. On the ETA Form 9089, signed by the beneficiary on April 7, 2008, the beneficiary claimed to have worked for the petitioner since August 29, 2006.

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'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 Sonogawa*, 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. In the instant case, the petitioner submitted a 2008 Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form W-2 stating that it paid the beneficiary \$25,056 and 2009 pay stubs evidencing that it paid the beneficiary \$10,368 through May 29, 2009. As these amounts are less than the proffered wage, the petitioner must establish its ability to pay the difference between the actual wage paid and the proffered wage, which in 2008 is \$10,324 and in 2009 is \$25,048.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

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).

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

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

In the instant case, the sole proprietor supports a family of two. The proprietor's tax returns reflect the proprietor's adjusted gross income (AGI) (Form 1040, line 37) for 2008 is \$27,515 and she submitted a 2009 estimated tax statement stating an expected AGI of \$27,515 in 2009 as well.<sup>2</sup>

Although the sole proprietor's adjusted gross income in 2008 exceeds the difference between the actual wage paid to the beneficiary and the proffered wage, the record contains no statement of usual household expenses. It is improbable that the sole proprietor could support herself and her child on \$17,191, the amount remaining after a reduction over one-third of her AGI which represents the difference between the actual wage paid and the proffered wage.

On appeal, counsel asserts that in addition to the amounts reflected on the 2008 Form W-2, the petitioner paid "the balance . . . in cash and other benefits." In support of this assertion, the petitioner submitted three bank withdrawal slips for \$50, \$888, and \$888 respectively made out to the beneficiary. First, there is no evidence in the record to establish that these payments were not

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<sup>2</sup> The petitioner also submitted its 2007 Form W-2 for the beneficiary and the 2007 Form 1040. As those documents cover a time prior to the priority date, they can be considered only generally.

reflected on the 2008 Form W-2.<sup>3</sup> Second, even if they were additional payments to the salary reflected as paid on the Form W-2, the amounts submitted total \$1,856, which is less than the

<sup>3</sup> The IRS instructions for the Form W-2 state that all remuneration paid to the employee whether in the form of cash or other benefits, should be reflected as payments made to that employee on the Form W-2. See <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/iw2w3.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2013). Specifically, the instructions state to include:

1. Total wages, bonuses (including signing bonuses), prizes, and awards paid to employees during the year. See *Calendar year basis* on page 11.
2. Total noncash payments, including certain fringe benefits. See *Fringe benefits* on page 8.
3. Total tips reported by the employee to the employer (not allocated tips).
4. Certain employee business expense reimbursements (see *Employee business expense reimbursements* on page 7).
5. The cost of accident and health insurance premiums for 2%-or-more shareholder-employees paid by an S corporation.
6. Taxable benefits from a section 125 (cafeteria) plan if the employee chooses cash.
7. Employee contributions to an Archer MSA.
8. Employer contributions to an Archer MSA if includible in the income of the employee. See *Archer MSA* on page 6.
9. Employer contributions for qualified long-term care services to the extent that such coverage is provided through a flexible spending or similar arrangement.
10. Taxable cost of group-term life insurance in excess of \$50,000. See *Group-term life insurance* on page 8.
11. Unless excludable under *Educational assistance programs* (see page 7), payments for non-job-related education expenses or for payments under a nonaccountable plan. See Pub. 970.
12. The amount includible as wages because you paid your employee's share of social security and Medicare taxes. See *Employee's social security and Medicare taxes paid by employer* on page 7. If you also paid your employee's income tax withholding, treat the grossed-up amount of that withholding as supplemental wages and report those wages in boxes 1, 3, 5, and 7. No exceptions to this treatment apply to household or agricultural wages.
13. Designated Roth contributions made under a section 401(k) plan, a section 403(b) salary reduction agreement, or a governmental section 457(b) plan. See *Designated Roth contributions* on page 7.
14. Distributions to an employee or former employee from an NQDC plan (including a rabbi trust) or a nongovernmental section 457(b) plan.
15. Amounts includible in income under section 457(f) because the amounts are no longer subject to a substantial risk of forfeiture.
16. Payments to statutory employees who are subject to social security and Medicare taxes but not subject to federal income tax withholding must be shown in box 1 as other compensation. See *Statutory employee* on page 17.
17. Cost of current insurance protection under a compensatory split-dollar life insurance arrangement.
18. Employee contributions to a health savings account (HSA).

difference between the actual wage paid and the proffered wage, so would be insufficient to demonstrate the petitioner's ability to pay the full proffered wage in 2008.

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 proprietor's AGI was less than the proffered wage in 2007 and only slightly more than the proffered wage in 2008 and 2009. The proprietor did not submit a statement of household expenses so we are unable to ascertain her ability to support herself and her child on the reported AGI. In addition, although she claims to employ four workers on the Form I-140, the

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19. Employer contributions to an HSA if includible in the income of the employee. See *Health savings account (HSA)* on page 8.
  20. Amounts includible in income under an NQDC plan because of section 409A. See *Nonqualified deferred compensation plans* on page 9.
  21. Payments made to former employees while they are on active duty in the Armed Forces or other uniformed services.
  22. All other compensation, including certain scholarship and fellowship grants (see page 10). Other compensation includes taxable amounts that you paid to your employee from which federal income tax was not withheld. You may show other compensation on a separate Form W-2. See *Multiple forms* on page 12.

It is unclear how any payments made to the beneficiary by the petitioner would fail to fall in one of these categories so that the petitioner would not be obligated to include such payments on the beneficiary's Form W-2.

(b)(6)

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amount of wages paid in 2007 and 2008 were less than \$50,000. The petitioner submitted no evidence to demonstrate that it suffered unusual expenses or circumstances in any particular year such as in *Sonegawa* which would explain its inability to pay the proffered wage. 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 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.