



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
DEFENSE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS



In the matter of:

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ISCR Case No. 24-01706  
Applicant for Security Clearance )

**Appearances**

For Government:

Tara Karoian, Esquire, Department Counsel

For Applicant:

*Pro se*

08/14/2025

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**Decision**

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CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

On August 28, 2023, Applicant submitted her Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). On October 17, 2024, the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency Consolidated Adjudication Services (DCSA CAS) issued Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR) detailing security concerns under Guideline H (Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse). The action was taken under Executive Order 10865, *Safeguarding Classified Information within Industry* (February 20, 1960), as amended; Department of Defense Directive 5220.6, *Defense Industrial Personnel Security Clearance Review Program* (January 2, 1992), as amended (Directive); and the Adjudicative Guidelines effective June 8, 2017.

Applicant answered the SOR in writing on October 31, 2024, and requested a hearing before an administrative judge. The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) received the request on or about November 4, 2024. I received the case assignment on April 10, 2025. DOHA issued a Notice of Hearing on April 14, 2025, and I convened the hearing as scheduled on June 12, 2025. The Government offered Exhibits (GXs) 1 and 2, which were received without objection. Applicant testified and asked that the record be kept open until July 11, 2025, for the receipt of additional documentation. On June 25, 2025, Applicant submitted a closing statement. DOHA received the transcript of the hearing (TR) on June 27, 2025. Based upon a review of the pleadings, exhibits, and testimony, eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

### **Findings of Fact**

In her Answer to the SOR Applicant denied the factual allegations in Paragraph 1 of the SOR, with explanations She also provided additional information to support her request for eligibility for a security clearance.

Applicant is 62 years old, married, and has two adult children. She has a master's degree and works as a consultant for defense contractors. (TR at page 5 line 19 to page 6 line 6, at page 14 lines 13~23, and GX 1 at pages 5, 9~10, 17, and 20~21.)

### **Guideline H – Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse**

1.a. Applicant denies the allegation of investing in the cultivation of marijuana, which she insists is legal under her state's law. However, I find the following: Applicant is aiding (providing space in her basement for her son to cultivate marijuana) and abetting (providing financial support for her son's marijuana cultivation). Applicant began her support of her son's marijuana cultivation in about September 2019, until at least the time of her hearing, June 12, 2025. In her closing argument, Applicant admits to continuing this support, which she insists is of a "patent-pending agricultural system." (TR at page 15 line 24 to page 16 line 25, at page 18 line 18 to page 27 line 9, at page 28 line 12 to page 29 line 14, and at page 34 line 10 to page 37 line 21.)

### **Policies**

When evaluating an applicant's suitability for a security clearance, the administrative judge must consider the adjudicative guidelines (AG). In addition to brief introductory explanations for each guideline, the adjudicative guidelines list potentially disqualifying conditions and mitigating conditions, which are useful in evaluating an applicant's eligibility for access to classified information.

These guidelines are not inflexible rules of law. Instead, recognizing the complexities of human behavior, administrative judges apply the guidelines in conjunction with the factors listed in AG ¶ 2 describing the adjudicative process. The administrative judge's overarching adjudicative goal is a fair, impartial, and commonsense decision. According to AG ¶ 2(a), the entire process is a conscientious scrutiny of a number of variables known as the whole-person concept. The administrative judge must consider all available, reliable information about the person, past and present, favorable and unfavorable, in making a decision.

The protection of the national security is the paramount consideration. AG ¶ 2(b) requires that “[a]ny doubt concerning personnel being considered for national security eligibility will be resolved in favor of the national security.” In reaching this decision, I have drawn only those conclusions that are reasonable, logical and based on the evidence contained in the record. Likewise, I have avoided drawing inferences grounded on mere speculation or conjecture.

Under Directive ¶ E3.1.14, the Government must present evidence to establish controverted facts alleged in the SOR. Under Directive ¶ E3.1.15, an “applicant is responsible for presenting witnesses and other evidence to rebut, explain, extenuate, or mitigate facts admitted by the applicant or proven by Department Counsel, and has the ultimate burden of persuasion as to obtaining a favorable clearance decision.”

A person who seeks access to classified information enters into a fiduciary relationship with the Government predicated upon trust and confidence. This relationship transcends normal duty hours and endures throughout off-duty hours. The Government reposes a high degree of trust and confidence in individuals to whom it grants access to classified information. Decisions include, by necessity, consideration of the possible risk the applicant may deliberately or inadvertently fail to protect or safeguard classified information. Such decisions entail a certain degree of legally permissible extrapolation as to potential, rather than actual, risk of compromise of classified information.

Section 7 of Executive Order 10865 provides that decisions shall be “in terms of the national interest and shall in no sense be a determination as to the loyalty of the applicant concerned.” See also EO 12968, Section 3.1(b) (listing multiple prerequisites for access to classified or sensitive information).

## Analysis

### **Guideline H - Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse**

The security concern relating to the guideline for Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse is set forth at AG ¶ 24:

The illegal use of controlled substances, to include the misuse of prescription and non-prescription drugs, and the use of other substances that cause physical or mental impairment or are used in a manner inconsistent with their intended purpose can raise questions about an individual's reliability and trustworthiness, both because such behavior may lead to physical or psychological impairment and because it raises questions about a person's ability or willingness to comply with laws, rules, and regulations. *Controlled substance* means any "controlled substance" as defined in 21 U.S.C. 802. *Substance misuse* is the generic term adopted in this guideline to describe any of the behaviors listed above.

The guideline at AG ¶ 25 contains seven conditions that could raise a security concern and may be disqualifying. Three conditions are established:

- (a) any substance misuse (see above definition);
- (c) illegal possession of a controlled substance, including cultivation, processing, manufacture, purchase, sale, or distribution; or possession of drug paraphernalia; and
- (g) expressed intent to continue drug involvement and substance misuse, or failure to clearly and convincingly commit to discontinue such misuse.

Appellant has been aiding and abetting her son's cultivation of marijuana in her basement from September 2019 to the present. Therefore, AG ¶ 25 (a), (c) and (g) are established.

The guideline at AG ¶ 26 contains four conditions that could mitigate security concerns. Two conditions may be applicable:

- (a) the behavior happened so long ago, was so infrequent, or happened under such circumstances that it is unlikely to recur or does not cast doubt on the individual's current reliability, trustworthiness, or good judgment; and

(b) the individual acknowledges his or her drug involvement and substance misuse, provides evidence of actions taken to overcome this problem, and has established a pattern of abstinence, including, but not limited to:

- (1) disassociation from drug-using associates and contacts;
- (2) changing or avoiding the environment where drugs were used; and
- (3) providing a signed statement of intent to abstain from all drug involvement and substance misuse, acknowledging that any future involvement or misuse is grounds for revocation of national security eligibility.

Neither of these apply. Applicant continues to support her son in the cultivation of marijuana, which is violation of Federal law. Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse is found against Applicant. In the future, however, if she decides to cease her involvement in this Federally illegal conduct, Applicant may again apply for a security clearance, after the passage of an appropriate amount of time. However, there is no guarantee that she will be found eligible in the future.

### **Whole-Person Concept**

Under the whole-person concept, the administrative judge must evaluate an applicant's eligibility for a security clearance by considering the totality of an applicant's conduct and all the circumstances. The administrative judge should consider the nine adjudicative process factors listed at AG ¶ 2(d):

- (1) the nature, extent, and seriousness of the conduct;
- (2) the circumstances surrounding the conduct, to include knowledgeable participation;
- (3) the frequency and recency of the conduct;
- (4) the individual's age and maturity at the time of the conduct;
- (5) the extent to which participation is voluntary;
- (6) the presence or absence of rehabilitation and other permanent behavioral changes;
- (7) the motivation for the conduct;
- (8) the potential for pressure, coercion, exploitation, or duress; and
- (9) the likelihood of continuation or recurrence.

AG ¶ 2(b) requires each case must be judged on its own merits. Under AG ¶ 2(c), the ultimate determination of whether to grant eligibility for a security clearance must be an overall commonsense judgment based upon careful consideration of the guidelines and the whole person concept. Overall, the record evidence leaves me with questions and doubts as to Applicant's eligibility and suitability for a security clearance. For all these

reasons, I conclude Applicant failed to mitigate the security concerns arising from her drug involvement and substance abuse.

### **Formal Findings**

Formal findings for or against Applicant on the allegations set forth in the SOR, as required by ¶ E3.1.25 of Enclosure 3 of the Directive, are:

Paragraph 1, Guideline H:                           **AGAINST APPLICANT**

Subparagraph 1.a:                                   Against Applicant

### **Conclusion**

In light of all of the circumstances presented by the record in this case, it is not clearly consistent with the national interest to grant Applicant national security eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is denied.

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Richard A. Cefola  
Administrative Judge