



**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS**



Appearances

For Government:
Andrew Henderson, Esquire, Department Counsel

For Applicant:
Ryan C. Nerney, Esquire

03/12/2025

Decision

CEFOLA, Richard A., Administrative Judge:

On January 10, 2024, Applicant submitted his Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). On September 9, 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 soon thereafter, and requested a hearing before an administrative judge. The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) received the request on December 10, 2024. I received the case assignment on

December 10, 2024. DOHA issued a Notice of Hearing on December 19, 2024, and I convened the hearing as scheduled on February 6, 2025. The Government offered Exhibits (GXs) 1 through 3, which were received without objection. Applicant testified and submitted Exhibits (AppXs) A through I, without objection. He also asked that the record be kept open until March 6, 2025, for the receipt of additional documentation. On February 10, 2025 Applicant also submitted AppXs J and K, and the Government also submitted GX 4, all of which were admitted without objection. DOHA received the transcript of the hearing (TR) on February 18, 2025. Based upon a review of the pleadings, exhibits, and testimony, eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Findings of Fact

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

Applicant is 35 years old, married, and has no children. He has a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering. He works for a defense contractor. (TR at page 5 line to page 6 line 1, and at page 12 line 23 to page 15 line 15.)

Guideline H – Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse

1.a. and 1.b. Applicant used marijuana three times during a fourteen-year period from January 2009 until his last usage in October 2023, sixteen months prior to his hearing. His last two usages, in January 2019 (while he and his wife "were on vacation away from home") and in October 2023 (while he and his wife were again away from home on "a long weekend"), were after Applicant was granted a security clearance. Applicant knew or should have known that his last two usages were contrary to Federal law. (TR at page 16 line 9 to page 24 line 7, at page 26 line 4 to page 30 line 13, at page 30 line 17 to page 31 line 13, and GX 4.)

Applicant's employer's drug policy focuses on "use in the workplace," and use of "any controlled substance while on the job." It further prohibits employees "from having any controlled substances or their metabolites in their bodies at any time while on the job, while on the premises of the Company, while performing business on behalf of the Company, or while operating Company equipment." (AppX G.) He has now submitted a signed statement of intent to abstain from all future drug involvement and substance misuse. (AppX C.) Applicant has also submitted the results of a February 2025 Negative Hair Follicle Drug Test (AppX J), and evidence of his completion of on-line drug educational courses (AppXs D~F). Applicant's program manager, another manager, and a co-worker have submitted written letters of support on behalf of Applicant. (AppX B.)

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
- (f) any illegal drug use while granted access to classified information or holding a sensitive position.

Appellant used marijuana on three occasions from 2009 until 2023. He had a security clearance for his job at the time of his last two usages in January 2019 and in October 2023. Therefore, AG ¶ 25 (a), (c), and (f) 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.

Applicant has signed a statement of intent to abstain from all drug involvement and substance misuse. His usage was very infrequent, occurring only three times during a fourteen-year period. He now clearly understands that; not only is his usage prohibited at work, but usage at any time away from his workplace is clearly illegal. Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse is found for Applicant.

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.

I considered the potentially disqualifying and mitigating conditions in light of all the facts and circumstances surrounding this case. Applicant has eschewed any future drug involvement, and is clearly well respected in his workplace. Overall, the record evidence leaves me without questions or doubts as to Applicant's eligibility and suitability for a security clearance. For all these reasons, I conclude Applicant mitigated the security concerns arising from his past 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: **FOR APPLICANT**

Subparagraphs 1.a and 1.b: **For Applicant**

Conclusion

In light of all of the circumstances presented by the record in this case, it is clearly consistent with the national interest to grant Applicant national security eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Richard A. Cefola
Administrative Judge