

(b) *Mitigation.* (1) The Ruling Official may grant mitigation to a party not involved in the commission of the offense underlying forfeiture:

(i) Where the petitioner has not met the minimum conditions for remission, but the Ruling Official finds that some relief should be granted to avoid extreme hardship, and that return of the property combined with imposition of monetary and/or other conditions of mitigation in lieu of a complete forfeiture will promote the interest of justice and will not diminish the deterrent effect of the law. Extenuating circumstances justifying such a finding include those circumstances that reduce the responsibility of the petitioner for knowledge of the illegal activity, knowledge of the criminal record of a user of the property, or failure to take reasonable steps to prevent the illegal use or acquisition by another for some reason, such as a reasonable fear of reprisal; or

(ii) Where the minimum standards for remission have been satisfied but the overall circumstances are such that, in the opinion of the Ruling Official, complete relief is not warranted.

(2) The Ruling Officials may in his or her discretion grant mitigation to a party involved in the commission of the offense underlying the forfeiture where certain mitigating factors exist, including, but not limited to: the lack of a prior record or evidence of similar criminal conduct; if the violation does not include drug distribution, manufacturing, or importation, the fact that the violator has taken steps, such as drug treatment, to prevent further criminal conduct; the fact that the violation was minimal and was not part of a larger criminal scheme; the fact that the violator has cooperated with federal, state, or local investigations relating to the criminal conduct underlying the forfeiture; or the fact that complete forfeiture of an asset is not necessary to achieve the legitimate purposes of forfeiture.

(3) Mitigation may take the form of a monetary condition or the imposition of other conditions relating to the continued use of the property, and the return of the property, in addition to the imposition of any other costs that would be chargeable as a condition to

remission. This monetary condition is considered as an item of cost payable by the petitioner, and shall be deposited into the Assets Forfeiture Fund as an amount realized from forfeiture in accordance with the applicable statute. If the petitioner fails to accept the Ruling Official's mitigation decision or any of its conditions, or fails to pay the monetary amount within twenty (20) days of the receipt of the decision, the property shall be sold, and the monetary amount imposed and other costs chargeable as a condition to mitigation shall be subtracted from the proceeds of the sale before transmitting the remainder to the petitioner.

§9.6 Special rules for specific petitioners.

(a) *General creditors.* A general creditor may not be granted remission or mitigation of forfeiture unless he or she otherwise qualifies as petitioner under this part.

(b) *Rival claimants.* If the beneficial owner of the forfeited property and the owner of a security interest in the same property each files a petition, and if both petitions are found to be meritorious, the claims of the beneficial owner shall take precedence.

(c) *Voluntary bailments.* A petitioner who allows another to use his or her property without cost, and who is not in the business of lending money secured by property or of leasing or renting property for profit, shall be granted remission or mitigation of forfeiture in accordance with the provisions of §9.5.

(d) *Lessors.* A person engaged in the business of leasing or renting real or personal property on a long-term basis with the right to sublease shall not be entitled to remission or mitigation of a forfeiture of such property unless the lessor can demonstrate compliance with all the requirements of §9.5.

(e) *Straw owners.* A petition by any person who has acquired a property interest recognizable under this part, and who knew or had reason to believe that the interest was conveyed by the previous owner for the purpose of circumventing seizure, forfeiture, or the regulations in this part, shall be denied. A petition by a person who purchases or owns property for another who has a record for related crimes as defined in

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§9.2(r), or a petition by a lienholder who knows or has reason to believe that the purchaser or owner of record is not the real purchaser or owner, shall be denied unless both the purchaser of record and the real purchaser or owner meet the requirements of §9.5.

(f) *Judgment creditors.* (1) A judgment creditor will be recognized as a lienholder if:

(i) The judgment was duly recorded before the seizure of the property for forfeiture;

(ii) Under applicable state or other local law, the judgment constitutes a valid lien on the property that attached to it before the seizure of the property for forfeiture; and

(iii) The petitioner had no knowledge of the commission of any act or acts giving rise to the forfeiture at the time the judgment became a lien on the forfeited property.

(2) A judgment creditor will not be recognized as a lienholder if the property in question is not property of which the judgment debtor is entitled to claim ownership under applicable state or other local law (e.g., stolen property). A judgment creditor is entitled under this part to no more than the amount of the judgment, exclusive of any interest, costs, or other fees including attorney's fees associated with the action that led to the judgment or its collection.

(3) A judgment creditor's lien must be registered in the district where the property is located if the judgment was obtained outside the district.

§9.7 Terms and conditions of remission and mitigation.

(a) *Owners.* (1) An owner's interest in property that has been forfeited is represented by the property itself or by a monetary interest equivalent to that interest at the time of seizure. Whether the property or a monetary equivalent will be remitted to an owner shall be determined at the discretion of the Ruling Official.

(2) If a civil judicial forfeiture action against the property is pending, release of the property must await an appropriate court order.

(3) Where the government sells or disposes of the property prior to the grant of the remission, the owner shall re-

ceive the proceeds of that sale, less any costs incurred by the government in the sale. The Ruling Official, at his or her discretion, may waive the deduction of costs and expenses incident to the forfeiture.

(4) Where the owner does not comply with the conditions imposed upon release of the property by the Ruling Official, the property shall be sold. Following the sale, the proceeds shall be used to pay all costs of the forfeiture and disposition of the property, in addition to any monetary conditions imposed. The remaining balance shall be paid to the owner.

(b) *Lienholders.* (1) When the forfeited property is to be retained for official use or transferred to a state or local law enforcement agency or foreign government pursuant to law, and remission or mitigation has been granted to a lienholder, the recipient of the property shall assure that:

(i) In the case of remission, the lien is satisfied as determined through the petition process; or

(ii) In the case of mitigation, an amount equal to the net equity, less any monetary conditions imposed, is paid to the lienholder prior to the release of the property to the recipient agency of foreign government.

(2) When the forfeited property is not retained for official use or transferred to another agency or foreign government pursuant to law, the lienholder shall be notified by the Ruling Official of the right to select either of the following alternatives:

(i) *Return of property.* The lienholder may obtain possession of the property after paying the United States, through the Ruling Official, the costs and expenses incident to the forfeiture, the amount, if any, by which the appraised value of the property exceeds the lienholder's net equity in the property, and any amount specified in the Ruling Official's decision as a condition to remit the property. The Ruling Official, at his or her discretion, may waive costs and expenses incident to the forfeiture. The Ruling Official shall forward a copy of the decision, a memorandum of disposition, and the original releases to the United States Marshals Service or other property