ORIGINAL

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

LIEM THANH LAM,

Petitioner,

v.

KRISTI NOEM, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, PAMELA JO BONDI, Attorney General, TODD M. LYONS, Acting Director, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, JESUS ROCHA, Acting Field Office Director, San Diego Field Office, CHRISTOPHER LAROSE, Warden at Otay Mesa Detention Center,

Respondents.

CIVIL CASE NO.: '25CV3141 CAB MSB

Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus

[Civil Immigration Habeas, 28 U.S.C. § 2241]

[1] Mr. Lam is filing this petition for a writ of habeas corpus with the assistance of the Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc., who drafted the instant petition. That same counsel also assisted the petitioner in preparing and submitting his request for the appointment of counsel, which has been filed concurrently with this petition, and all other documents supporting the petition. Federal Defenders has consistently used this procedure in seeking appointment for immigration habeas cases.

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I. Introduction

Mr. Lam is 61 years old. He was born in Vietnam and came to the United States in 1986 with his mother and siblings. He later became a lawful permanent resident. He was ordered removed by an immigration judge in 2010. But Vietnam wouldn't accept him, in line with its general policy of not accepting pre-1995 immigrants for deportation. Mr. Lam was released on an order of supervision.

Mr. Lam remained on supervision for the next 15 years. He checked in with ICE every year without incident. When he went for his annual check-in on October 22, 2025, ICE re-detained him. Contrary to regulation, ICE did not notify Mr. Lam of any changed circumstances that made his removal more likely, like it receiving news from Vietnam that it would now accept Mr. Lam despite not accepting him 15 years ago. Nor did it give Mr. Lam an opportunity to contest his re-detention. Worse yet, on July 9, 2025, ICE adopted a new policy permitting removals to third countries with no notice, six hours' notice, or 24 hours' notice depending on the circumstances, providing no meaningful opportunity to make a fear-based claim against removal.

Mr. Lam's detention violates his statutory and regulatory rights, *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678 (2001), and the Fifth Amendment. Courts in this district have agreed in similar circumstances as to each of Mr. Lam's three claims. Specifically:

(1) Regulatory and due process violations: Mr. Lam must be released because ICE's failure to follow its own regulations about notice and an opportunity to be heard violate due process. *See, e.g.*, *Constantinovici v. Bondi*, __ F. Supp. 3d __, 2025 WL 2898985, No. 25-cv-2405-RBM (S.D. Cal. Oct. 10, 2025); *Rokhfirooz v. Larose*, No. 25-cv-2053-RSH, 2025 WL 2646165 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 15, 2025); *Phan v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2898977, No. 25-cv-2422-RBM-MSB, *3–*5 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 10, 2025); *Sun v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2800037, No. 25-cv-2433-CAB (S.D. Cal. Sept. 30, 2025); *Van Tran v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2770623, No.

25-cv-2334-JES, *3 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 29, 2025); *Truong v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-02597-JES, ECF No. 10 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 10, 2025); *Khambounheuang v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-02575-JO-SBC, ECF No. 12 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 9, 2025) (all either granting temporary restraining orders releasing noncitizens, or granting habeas petitions outright, due to ICE regulatory violations during recent re-detentions of released noncitizens previously ordered removed).

(2) Zadvydas violations: Mr. Lam must also be released under *Zadvydas* because—having proved unable to remove him for the last 15 years—the government cannot show that there is a "significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future." *Id.* at 701. *See, e.g.*, *Conchas-Valdez*, 2025 WL 2884822, No. 25-cv-2469-DMS (S.D. Cal. Oct. 6, 2025); *Rebenok v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-2171-TWR, ECF No. 13 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 25, 2025) (granting habeas petitions releasing noncitizens due to *Zadvydas* violations).

(3) Third-country removal statutory and due process violations: This Court should enjoin ICE from removing Mr. Lam to a third country without providing an opportunity to assert fear of persecution or torture before an immigration judge. *See, e.g.*, *Rebenok v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-2171-TWR at ECF No. 13; *Van Tran v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2770623 at *3; *Nguyen Tran v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-2391-BTM, ECF No. 6 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 18, 2025); *Louangmilith v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2881578, No. 25-cv-2502-JES, *4 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 9, 2025) (all either granting temporary restraining orders or habeas petitions ordering the government to not remove petitioners to third countries pending litigation or reopening of their immigration cases).

This Court should grant this habeas petition and issue appropriate injunctive relief on all three grounds.

II. Statement of Facts

A. Mr. Lam is ordered removed, held in ICE custody, and released as ICE proves unable to deport him for the next 15 years, until he is arrested at his annual ICE check-in.

In 1986, Mr. Lam fled Vietnam with his mother and two siblings. Declaration of Liem Thanh Lam, Exhibit A ("Exh. A") ¶ 1. He soon obtained lawful permanent status in the Untied States. *Id.* An immigration judge ordered him removed on April 10, 2010.[2] *Id.* at ¶ 3. Mr. Lam was detained for approximately three months after the order of removal. *Id.* He was then placed under an order of supervision. *Id.* For the next 15 years, Mr. Lam had no issues on supervision. *Id.* at ¶ 5. He checked in every time ICE asked him to. *Id.*

On October 22, 2025, Mr. Lam went in for his scheduled check-in. *Id.* at ¶ 6. ICE agents detained him, and without further explanation, they arrested him. *Id.* No one gave him notice of why he was being re-detained. *Id.* No one gave him a chance to fight his re-detention. *Id.* No one told him what changed to make it more likely that he could be removed to Vietnam. *Id.* Since his detention, ICE has not spoken to him about his detention or his removal. *Id.* at ¶ 7.

B. Vietnam has a longstanding policy of not accepting Vietnamese immigrants who entered before 1995.

There is a reason why ICE has proved unable to remove Mr. Lam for the last 15 years: Vietnam has a general policy of not accepting pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants for deportation. In 2008, Vietnam and the United States signed a repatriation treaty under which Vietnam agreed to consider accepting certain Vietnamese immigrants for deportation. *See Trinh v. Homan*, 466 F. Supp. 3d 1077, 1083 (C.D. Cal. 2020). The treaty exempted pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants, providing, "Vietnamese citizens are not subject to return to Vietnam under this Agreement if they arrived in the United States before July 12, 1995."

[2] EOIR, *Automated Case Information*, https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/en/.

Agreement Between the United States of America and Vietnam, at 2 (Jan. 22, 2008).[3]

Despite that limit, the first Trump administration detained Vietnamese immigrants and held them for months, while the administration tried to pressure Vietnam to take them. *See Trinh*, 466 F. Supp. 3d at 1083–84. That possibility did not materialize. "In total, between 2017 and 2019, ICE requested travel documents for pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants 251 times. Vietnam granted those requests only 18 times, in just over seven percent of cases." *Id.* at 1084. The administration was forced to release many of these detainees in 2018. *See id.*

Eventually, in 2020, the administration secured a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with Vietnam, which created a process through which the Vietnamese government could consider some pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants for removal.[4] The MOU limited consideration to persons meeting certain criteria, but many these criteria have been shielded from public view. *See Nguyen v. Scott*, No. 2:25-CV-01398, 2025 WL 2419288, at *14 (W.D. Wash. Aug. 21, 2025). When an immigrant does qualify, the MOU provides only that Vietnam has "discretion whether to issue a travel document," which it exercises "on a case-by-case basis." *Hoac v. Becerra*, No. 2:25-CV-01740-DC-JDP, 2025 WL 1993771, at *5 (E.D. Cal. July 16, 2025).

Even after signing the MOU, Vietnam overwhelmingly declined to timely issue travel documents for pre-1995 immigrants. By October 2021, ICE had adopted a "policy of generally finding that 'pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants' . . . are not likely to be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future." Order on Joint Motion for Entry of Stipulated Dismissal, *Trihn*, 18-CV-

[3] https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/08-322-Vietnam-Repatriations.pdf

[4] https://cdn.craft.cloud/5cd1c590-65ba-4ad2-a52c-b55e67f8f04b/assets/media/ALC-FOIA-Re-Release-MOU-bates-1-8-8-10-21.pdf

316-CJC-GJS, Dkt. 161 at 3 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 7, 2021).[5] That admission aligned with two years' worth of quarterly reports that ICE agreed to submit as part of a class action settlement. Those quarterly reports showed that between September 2021 and September 2023, only four immigrants who came to the U.S. before 1995 were given travel documents and deported. Asian Law Caucus, *Resources on Deportation of Vietnamese Immigrants Who Entered the U.S. Before 1995* (Jul. 15, 2025) (providing links to all quarterly reports).[6] During the same period, ICE made 14 requests for travel documents that, as of 2023, had not been granted, including requests made months or years before the September 2023 cutoff. *See id.* (proposed counsel's count based on quarterly reports).

On June 9, 2025, the Trump administration rescinded ICE's policy of generally finding that pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants were not likely to be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future. *See Nguyen v. Scott*, No. 2:25-CV-01398, 2025 WL 2419288, at *7 (W.D. Wash. Aug. 21, 2025). But since then, several courts have found that facts on the ground likely have not changed enough to show that any individual pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrant will be timely removed to Vietnam. *See Nguyen v. Scott*, No. 2:25-CV-01398, 2025 WL 2419288, at *17 (W.D. Wash. Aug. 21, 2025); *Hoac*, 2025 WL 1993771, at *4; *Nguyen v. Hyde*, No. 25-CV-11470-MJJ, 2025 WL 1725791, at *5 (D. Mass. June 20, 2025); *Ho v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-2453-BAS, ECF No. 11 at 3, 6 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 20, 2025); *Thanh Nguyen v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-2760-TWR, ECF No. 12 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 23, 2025).

[5] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f0cc12a064e9716d52e6052/t/618e99e5613d7372c1bb197e/1636735461479/Trinh+-+Doc+161+Order+Granting+Stip+Dismissal.pdf.

[6] https://www.asianlawcaucus.org/news-resources/guides-reports/trinh-reports

C. The government is carrying out deportations to third countries without providing sufficient notice and opportunity to be heard.

When immigrants cannot be removed to their home country—including Vietnamese immigrants—ICE has begun deporting those individuals to third countries without adequate notice or a hearing. *See* Edward Wong et al, *Inside the Global Deal-Making Behind Trump's Mass Deportations*, N.Y. Times, June 25, 2025. This summer and fall, ICE has carried out highly publicized third country deportations to prisons in South Sudan, Eswatini, Ghana, and Rwanda. Nokukhanya Musi & Gerald Imray, *10 more deportees from the US arrive in the African nation of Eswatini*, Associated Press (Oct. 6, 2025).[7] At least four men deported to Eswatini have remained in a maximum-security prison there for nearly three months without charge and without access to counsel; another six are detained incommunicado in South Sudan, and another seven are being held in an undisclosed facility in Rwanda. *Id.* Several of these men are Vietnamese. *Id.*

In February, Panama and Costa Rica imprisoned hundreds of deportees—including immigrants from Vietnam—in hotels, a jungle camp, and a detention center. Vanessa Buschschluter, *Costa Rican court orders release of migrants deported from U.S.*, BBC (Jun. 25, 2025)[8]; Human Rights Watch, *'Nobody Cared, Nobody Listened': The US Expulsion of Third-Country Nationals to Panama*, Apr. 24, 2025.[9]

On July 9, 2025, ICE rescinded previous guidance meant to give immigrants a "'meaningful opportunity' to assert claims for protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) before initiating removal to a third country" like the ones just described. Exhibit B (July 9, 2025 Third Country Removal

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[7] https://apnews.com/article/eswatini-deportees-us-trump-immigration-74b2f942003a80a21b33084a4109a0d2.

[8] https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwyrn42kp7no.

[9] https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/04/24/nobody-cared-nobody-listened/the-us-expulsion-of-third-country-nationals-to.

Policy). Instead, under new guidance, ICE may remove any immigrant to a third country "without the need for further procedures," as long as—in the view of the State Department—the United States has received "credible" "assurances" from that country that deportees will not be persecuted or tortured. *Id.* at 1. If a country fails to credibly promise not to persecute or torture releasees, ICE may still remove immigrants there with minimal notice. *Id.* Ordinarily, ICE must provide 24 hours' notice. But "[i]n exigent circumstances," a removal may take place in as little as six hours, "as long as the alien is provided reasonable means and opportunity to speak with an attorney prior to the removal." *Id.*

Under this policy, the United States has deported noncitizens to prisons and military camps in Rwanda, Eswatini, South Sudan, and Ghana. Many are still detained to this day, in countries to which they have never been, without charge. *See* Musi & Gerald Imray, *supra*.

III. Legal Analysis.

This Court should grant this petition and order two forms of relief.

First, it should order Mr. Lam's immediate release. ICE failed to follow its own regulations requiring changed circumstances before re-detention, as well as a chance to promptly contest a re-detention decision. And *Zadvydas v. Davis* holds that immigration statutes do not authorize the government to detain immigrants like Mr. Lam, for whom there is "no significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future." 533 U.S. 678, 701 (2001).

Second, it should enjoin the Respondents from removing Mr. Lam to a third country without first providing notice and a sufficient opportunity to be heard before an immigration judge.

IV. Claim 1: ICE failed to comply with its own regulations before re-detaining Mr. Lam, violating his rights under applicable regulations and due process.

Two regulations establish the process due to someone who is re-detained in immigration custody following a period of release. 8 C.F.R. § 241.4(l) applies to

all re-detentions, generally. 8 C.F.R. § 241.13(i) applies as an added, overlapping framework to persons released upon good reason to believe that they will not be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future, as Mr. Lam was. *See Phan v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2898977, No. 25-CV-2422-RBM-MSB, *3–*5 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 10, 2025) (explaining this regulatory framework and granting a habeas petition for ICE's failure to follow these regulations for a refugee of Vietnam who entered the United States before 1995); *Rokhfirooz*, No. 25-CV-2053-RSH-VET, 2025 WL 2646165 at *2 (same as to an Iranian national).

These regulations permit an official to "return [the person] to custody" only when the person "violate[d] any of the conditions of release," 8 C.F.R. §§ 241.13(i)(1), 241.4(l)(1), or, in the alternative, if an appropriate official "determines that there is a significant likelihood that the alien may be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future," and makes that finding "on account of changed circumstances," § 241.13(i)(2).

No matter the reason for re-detention, the re-detained person is entitled to certain procedural protections. For one, "'[u]pon revocation,' the noncitizen 'will be notified of the reasons for revocation of his or her release or parole.'" *Phan*, 2025 WL 2898977 at *3, *4 (quoting §§ 241.4(l)(1), 241.13(i)(3)). Further, the person "'will be afforded an initial informal interview promptly after his or her return' to be given 'an opportunity to respond to the reasons for revocation stated in the notification.'" *Id.*

In the case of someone released under § 241.13(i), the regulations also explicitly require the interviewer to allow the re-detained person to "submit any evidence or information that he or she believes shows there is no significant likelihood he or she be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future, or that he or she has not violated the order of supervision." § 241.13(i)(3).

ICE is required to follow its own regulations. *United States ex rel. Accardi v. Shaughnessy*, 347 U.S. 260, 268 (1954); *see Alcaraz v. INS*, 384 F.3d 1150,

1162 (9th Cir. 2004) ("The legal proposition that agencies may be required to abide by certain internal policies is well-established."). A court may review a re-detention decision for compliance with the regulations, and "where ICE fails to follow its own regulations in revoking release, the detention is unlawful and the petitioner's release must be ordered." *Rokhfirooz*, 2025 WL 2646165 at *4 (collecting cases); *accord Phan*, 2025 WL 2898977 at *5.

ICE followed none of its regulatory prerequisites to re-detention here.

First, ICE did not identify a proper reason under the regulations to re-detain Mr. Lam. Mr. Lam was not returned to custody because of a conditions violation, and there was apparently no determination before or at his arrest that there are "changed circumstances" such that there is "a significant likelihood that [Mr. Lam] may be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future." § 241.13(i)(2).

Second, ICE did not notify Mr. Lam of the reasons for his re-detention upon revocation of release. *See* §§ 241.4(l)(1), 241.13(i)(3). He was re-detained on October 22, 2025. Exh. A at ¶ 6. No one explained to him why he was being detained. *Id.* at ¶ 6.

Third, Mr. Lam has yet to receive the informal interview required by regulation. Nor has he been afforded a meaningful opportunity to respond to the reasons for revocation or submit evidence rebutting his re-detention. Exh. A ¶ 6–7. No one from ICE has invited him to contest his detention or even spoken to him. *Id.*

Numerous courts have released re-detained immigrants after finding that ICE failed to comply with applicable regulations this summer and fall. *See, e.g.*, *Phan*, 2025 WL 2898977 at *5; *Rokhfirooz*, 2025 WL 2646165; *Grigorian*, 2025 WL 2604573; *Delkash v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2683988; *Ceesay v. Kurzdorfer*, 781 F. Supp. 3d 137, 166 (W.D.N.Y. 2025); *You v. Nielsen*, 321 F. Supp. 3d 451, 463 (S.D.N.Y. 2018); *Rombot v. Souza*, 296 F. Supp. 3d 383, 387 (D. Mass. 2017); *Zhu v. Genalo*, No. 1:25-CV-06523 (JLR), 2025 WL 2452352, at *7–9 (S.D.N.Y.

Aug. 26, 2025); *M.S.L. v. Bostock*, No. 6:25-CV-01204-AA, 2025 WL 2430267, at *10–12 (D. Or. Aug. 21, 2025); *Escalante v. Noem*, No. 9:25-CV-00182-MJT, 2025 WL 2491782, at *2–3 (E.D. Tex. July 18, 2025); *Hoac v. Becerra*, No. 2:25-cv-01740-DC-JDP, 2025 WL 1993771, at *4 (E.D. Cal. July 16, 2025); *Liu*, 2025 WL 1696526, at *2; *M.Q. v. United States*, 2025 WL 965810, at *3, *5 n.1 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 31, 2025).

"[B]ecause officials did not properly revoke petitioner's release pursuant to the applicable regulations, that revocation has no effect, and [Mr. Lam] is entitled to his release (subject to the same Order of Supervision that governed his most recent release)." *Liu*, 2025 WL 1696526, at *3.

V. Claim 2: Mr. Lam's detention violates *Zadvydas* and 8 U.S.C. § 1231.

A. Legal background: The statute, as interpreted by *Zadvydas*, renders detention mandatory for 90 days after removal is ordered, presumptively acceptable for 180 days after removal is ordered, and allowable after 180 days after removal is ordered only if there is a significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future.

In *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678 (2001), the Supreme Court considered a problem affecting people like Mr. Lam: Federal law requires ICE to detain an immigrant during the "removal period," which typically spans the first 90 days after the immigrant is ordered removed. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)-(2). After that 90-day removal period expires, detention becomes discretionary—ICE may detain the migrant while continuing to try to remove them. *Id.* § 1231(a)(6). Ordinarily, this scheme would not lead to excessive detention, as removal happens within days or weeks. But some detainees cannot be removed quickly. Perhaps their removal "simply require[s] more time for processing," or they are "ordered removed to countries with whom the United States does not have a repatriation agreement," or their countries "refuse to take them," or they are "effectively 'stateless' because of their race and/or place of birth." *Kim Ho Ma v. Ashcroft*, 257 F.3d 1095, 1104 (9th Cir. 2001). In these and other circumstances, detained

immigrants can find themselves trapped in detention for months, years, decades, or even the rest of their lives. If federal law were understood to allow for "indefinite, perhaps permanent, detention," it would pose "a serious constitutional threat." *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 699. In *Zadvydas*, the Supreme Court avoided the constitutional concern by interpreting § 1231(a)(6) to incorporate implicit limits. *Id.* at 689.

Zadvydas held that § 1231(a)(6) presumptively permits the government to detain an immigrant for 180 days after his or her removal order becomes final. After those 180 days have passed, the immigrant must be released unless his or her removal is reasonably foreseeable. *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701. After six months have passed, the petitioner must only make a prima facie case for relief—there is "good reason to believe that there is no significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future." *Id.* Then the burden shifts to "the Government [to] respond with evidence sufficient to rebut that showing." *Id.*

Further, even before the 180 days have passed, the immigrant must still be released if he *rebuts* the presumption that his detention is reasonable. *See, e.g.*, *Trinh v. Homan*, 466 F. Supp. 3d 1077, 1092 (C.D. Cal. 2020) (collecting cases on rebutting the *Zadvydas* presumption before six months have passed); *Zavvar v. Scott*, Civil No. 25-2104-TDC, 2025 WL 2592543, *6 (D. Md. Sept. 8, 2025) (finding the presumption rebutted for a person who was immediately released after being ordered removed and, years later, re-detained for less than six months).

Mr. Lam can make all the threshold showings needed to prove his *Zadvydas* claim and shift the burden to the government.

B. Mr. Lam's six-month grace period expired in April 2018.

The six-month grace period has long since ended. The *Zadvydas* grace period is linked to the date the final order of removal is issued. It lasts for "*six months* after a final order of removal—that is, *three months* after the statutory removal period has ended." *Kim Ho Ma v. Ashcroft*, 257 F.3d 1095, 1102 n.5 (9th

Cir. 2001); *see also* 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(B) (linking the statutory removal period to issuance of the final order and other proceedings associated with the original removal order).

Here, Mr. Lam's order of removal was entered in April 12, 2010. Exh. A at ¶ 2.[10] Accordingly, his 90-day removal period began then. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(B). The *Zadvydas* grace period thus expired in October 2010, three months after the removal period ended. *See, e.g.*, *Tadros v. Noem*, 2025 WL 1678501, No. 25-cv-4108(EP), *2–*3.[11]

C. Mr. Lam's personal experience, and Vietnam's general policy of not repatriating most pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants, provide good reason to believe that Mr. Lam will not likely be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future.

This Court uses a burden-shifting framework to evaluate Mr. Lam's *Zadvydas* claim. At the first stage of the framework, Mr. Lam must "provide[] good reason to believe that there is no significant likelihood of removal in the

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[10] EOIR, *Automated Case Information*, https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/en/.

[11] The government has sometimes argued that release and rearrest resets the six-month grace period completely, taking the clock back to zero. "Courts . . . broadly agree" that this is not correct. *Diaz-Ortega v. Lund*, 2019 WL 6003485, at *7 n.6 (W.D. La. Oct. 15, 2019), *report and recommendation adopted*, 2019 WL 6037220 (W.D. La. Nov. 13, 2019); *see also Sied v. Nielsen,* No. 17-CV-06785-LB, 2018 WL 1876907, at *6 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 19, 2018) (collecting cases).

It has also sometimes argued that rearrest creates a new three-month grace period. As a court explained in *Bailey v. Lynch*, that view cannot be squared with the statutory definition of the removal period in 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(B). No. CV 16-2600 (JLL), 2016 WL 5791407, at *2 (D.N.J. Oct. 3, 2016). "Pursuant to the statute, the removal period, and in turn the [six-month] presumptively reasonable period, begins from the latest of 'the date the order of removal becomes administratively final,' the date of a reviewing court's final order where the removal order is judicially removed and that court orders a stay of removal, or the alien's release from detention or confinement where he was detained for reasons other than immigration purposes at the time of his final order of removal." *Id.* None of these statutory starting points have anything to do with whether or when an immigrant is detained. *See id.* Because the statutorily-defined removal period has nothing to do with release and rearrest, releasing and rearresting the immigrant cannot reset the removal period.

reasonably foreseeable future." *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701. This standard can be broken down into three parts.

"Good reason to believe." The "good reason to believe" standard is a relatively forgiving one. "A petitioner need not establish that there exists no possibility of removal." *Freeman v. Watkins*, No. CV B:09-160, 2009 WL 10714999, at *3 (S.D. Tex. Dec. 22, 2009). Nor does "'[g]ood reason to believe' . . . place a burden upon the detainee to demonstrate no reasonably foreseeable, significant likelihood of removal or show that his detention is indefinite; it is something less than that." *Rual v. Barr*, No. 6:20-CV-06215 EAW, 2020 WL 3972319, at *3 (W.D.N.Y. July 14, 2020) (quoting *Senor v. Barr*, 401 F. Supp. 3d 420, 430 (W.D.N.Y. 2019)). In short, the standard means what it says: Petitioners need only give a "good reason"—not prove anything to a certainty.

"Significant likelihood of removal." This component focuses on <u>whether</u> Mr. Lam will likely be removed: Continued detention is permissible only if it is "significant[ly] like[ly]" that ICE will be able to remove him. *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701. This inquiry targets "not only the *existence* of untapped possibilities, but also [the] probability of *success* in such possibilities." *Elashi v. Sabol*, 714 F. Supp. 2d 502, 506 (M.D. Pa. 2010) (second emphasis added). In other words, even if "there remains *some* possibility of removal," a petitioner can still meet its burden if there is good reason to believe that successful removal is not significantly likely. *Kacanic v. Elwood*, No. CIV.A. 02-8019, 2002 WL 31520362, at *4 (E.D. Pa. Nov. 8, 2002) (emphasis added).

"In the reasonably foreseeable future." This component of the test focuses on <u>when</u> Mr. Lam n will likely be removed: Continued detention is permissible only if removal is likely to happen "in the reasonably foreseeable future." *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701. This inquiry places a time limit on ICE's removal efforts. If the Court has "no idea of when it might reasonably expect [Petitioner] to be repatriated, this Court certainly cannot conclude that his removal

is likely to occur—or even that it might occur—in the reasonably foreseeable future." *Palma v. Gillis*, No. 5:19-CV-112-DCB-MTP, 2020 WL 4880158, at *3 (S.D. Miss. July 7, 2020), *report and recommendation adopted*, 2020 WL 4876859 (S.D. Miss. Aug. 19, 2020) (quoting *Singh v. Whitaker*, 362 F. Supp. 3d 93, 102 (W.D.N.Y. 2019)). Thus, even if this Court concludes that Mr. Lam "would *eventually* receive" a travel document, he can still meet his burden by giving good reason to anticipate sufficiently lengthy delays. *Younes v. Lynch*, 2016 WL 6679830, at *2 (E.D. Mich. Nov. 14, 2016).

Mr. Lam satisfies this standard for two reasons.

First, Mr. Lam's own experience bears this out. ICE has now had 15 years to deport him, including five years under the MOU. He has cooperated with ICE's removal efforts throughout that time. Exh. A ¶ 4–5. Yet ICE has proved unable to remove him.

Second, the general experience of other Vietnamese immigrants also bears this out. Vietnam often does not accept pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrants for deportation. Even after Vietnam signed the 2020 MOU, ICE had to admit that there was no reasonable likelihood of removing such immigrants in the reasonably foreseeable future, Order on Joint Motion for Entry of Stipulated Dismissal, *Trihn*, 18-CV-316-CJC-GJS, Dkt. 161 at 3 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 7, 2021)—an admission backed up by two years' experience under the MOU, Asian Law Caucus, *Resources on Deportation of Vietnamese Immigrants Who Entered the U.S. Before 1995* (Jul. 15, 2025) (providing links to all quarterly reports). Though the Trump administration rescinded this admission, *Nguyen*, 2025 WL 2419288, at *7, several courts have explained that barriers continue to obstruct removal for people like Mr. Lam. *See Nguyen*, 2025 WL 2419288; *Hoac*, 2025 WL 1993771; *Nguyen*, 2025 WL 1725791; *see also Than Nguyen*, No. 25-CV-2760-TWR at ECF No. 12 (minute order noting grant of *Zadvydas* petition as to pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrant on October 23, 2025); *Ho*, No. 25-cv-2453-BAS at ECF

No. 11 (granting preliminary injunction ordering release as to pre-1995 Vietnamese immigrant on October 20, 2025).

Thus, Mr. Lam has met his initial burden, and the burden shifts to the government. Unless the government can prove a "significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future," Mr. Lam must be released. *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701.

VI. Claim 3: ICE may not remove Mr. Lam to a third country without adequate notice and an opportunity to be heard.

In addition to unlawfully detaining him, ICE's policies threaten his removal to a third country without adequate notice and an opportunity to be heard. These policies violate the Fifth Amendment, the Convention Against Torture, and implementing regulations.

A. The Convention Against Torture, statutory withholding of removal, and due process prohibit deportation to third countries without meaningful notice and an opportunity to be heard.

U.S. law enshrines protections against dangerous and life-threatening removal decisions. By statute, the government is prohibited from removing an immigrant to any third country where they may be persecuted or tortured, a form of protection known as withholding of removal. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1231(b)(3)(A). The government "may not remove [a noncitizen] to a country if the Attorney General decides that the [noncitizen's] life or freedom would be threatened in that country because of the [noncitizen's] race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." *Id.*; *see also* 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.16, 1208.16. Withholding of removal is a mandatory protection.

Similarly, Congress codified protections enshrined in the CAT prohibiting the government from removing a person to a country where they would be tortured. *See* FARRA 2681-822 (codified as 8 U.S.C. § 1231 note) ("It shall be the policy of the United States not to expel, extradite, or otherwise effect the involuntary return of any person to a country in which there are substantial

grounds for believing the person would be in danger of being subjected to torture, regardless of whether the person is physically present in the United States."); 28 C.F.R. § 200.1; *id.* §§ 208.16-208.18, 1208.16-1208.18. CAT protection is also mandatory.

To comport with the requirements of due process, the government must provide notice of the third country removal and an opportunity to respond. Due process requires "written notice of the country being designated" and "the statutory basis for the designation, i.e., the applicable subsection of § 1231(b)(2)." *Aden v. Nielsen*, 409 F. Supp. 3d 998, 1019 (W.D. Wash. 2019); *accord D.V.D. v. U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec.*, No. 25-cv-10676-BEM, 2025 WL 1453640, at *1 (D. Mass. May 21, 2025); *Andriasian v. INS*, 180 F.3d 1033, 1041 (9th Cir. 1999).

The government must also "ask the noncitizen whether he or she fears persecution or harm upon removal to the designated country and memorialize in writing the noncitizen's response. This requirement ensures DHS will obtain the necessary information from the noncitizen to comply with section 1231(b)(3) and avoids [a dispute about what the officer and noncitizen said]." *Aden*, 409 F. Supp. 3d at 1019. "Failing to notify individuals who are subject to deportation that they have the right to apply for asylum in the United States and for withholding of deportation to the country to which they will be deported violates both INS regulations and the constitutional right to due process." *Andriasian*, 180 F.3d at 1041.

If the noncitizen claims fear, measures must be taken to ensure that the noncitizen can seek asylum, withholding, and relief under CAT before an immigration judge in reopened removal proceedings. The amount and type of notice must be "sufficient" to ensure that "given [a noncitizen's] capacities and circumstances, he would have a reasonable opportunity to raise and pursue his claim for withholding of deportation." *Aden*, 409 F. Supp. 3d at 1009

(citing *Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 349 (1976) and *Kossov v. I.N.S.*, 132 F.3d 405, 408 (7th Cir. 1998)); *cf. D.V.D.*, 2025 WL 1453640, at *1 (requiring the government to move to reopen the noncitizen's immigration proceedings if the individual demonstrates "reasonable fear" and to provide "a meaningful opportunity, and a minimum of fifteen days, for the non-citizen to seek reopening of their immigration proceedings" if the noncitizen is found to not have demonstrated "reasonable fear"); *Aden*, 409 F. Supp. 3d at 1019 (requiring notice and time for a respondent to file a motion to reopen and seek relief).

"[L]ast minute" notice of the country of removal will not suffice, *Andriasian*, 180 F.3d at 1041; *accord Najjar v. Lunch*, 630 Fed. App'x 724 (9th Cir. 2016), and for good reason: To have a meaningful opportunity to apply for fear-based protection from removal, immigrants must have time to prepare and present relevant arguments and evidence. Merely telling a person where they may be sent, without giving them a chance to look into country conditions, does not give them a meaningful chance to determine whether and why they have a credible fear. !

B. ICE's June 6, 2025 removal policies violate the Fifth Amendment, 8 U.S.C. § 1231, the Conviction Against Torture, and Implementing Regulations.

The policies in ICE's currently applicable June 6, 2025 memo do not adhere to these requirements. The memo "contravenes Ninth Circuit law." *Nguyen v. Scott*, No. 25-CV-1398, 2025 WL 2419288, *19 (W.D. Wash. Aug. 21, 2025) (explaining how the July 9, 2025 ICE memo contravenes Ninth Circuit law on the process due to noncitizens in detail); *see also Van Tran v. Noem*, 2025 WL 2770623, No 25-cv-2334-JES-MSB (S.D. Cal. Sept. 29, 2025) (granting temporary restraining order preventing a noncitizen's deportation to a third country pending litigation in light of due process problems); *Nguyen Tran v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-2391-BTM-BLM, ECF No. 6 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 18, 2025) (same).

First, under the policy, ICE need not give immigrants *any* notice or *any* opportunity to be heard before removing them to a country that—in the State Department's estimation—has provided "credible" "assurances" against persecution and torture. Exh. B. By depriving immigrants of any chance to challenge the State Department's view, this policy violates "[t]he essence of due process," "the requirement that a person in jeopardy of serious loss be given notice of the case against him and opportunity to meet it." *Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 348 (1976) (cleaned up).

Second, even when the government has obtained no credible assurances against persecution and torture, the government can still remove the person with between 6 and 24 hours' notice, depending on the circumstances. Exh. B. Practically speaking, there is not nearly enough time for a detained person to assess their risk in the third country and martial evidence to support any credible fear—let alone a chance to file a motion to reopen with an IJ.

An immigrant may know nothing about a third country, like Eswatini or South Sudan, when they are scheduled for removal there. Yet if given the opportunity to investigate conditions, immigrants would find credible reasons to fear persecution or torture—like patterns of keeping deportees indefinitely and without charge in solitary confinement or extreme instability raising a high likelihood of death—in many of the third countries that have agreed to removal thus far.

Due process requires an adequate chance to identify and raise these threats to health and life. This Court must prohibit the government from removing Mr. Lam without these due process safeguards.

VII. This Court must hold an evidentiary hearing on any disputed facts.

Resolution of a prolonged-detention habeas petition may require an evidentiary hearing. *Owino v. Napolitano*, 575 F.3d 952, 956 (9th Cir. 2009). Mr. Lam hereby requests such a hearing on any material, disputed facts.

VIII. Prayer for relief

For the foregoing reasons, Petitioner respectfully requests that this Court:

1. Order and enjoin Respondents to immediately release Petitioner from custody;
2. Enjoin Respondents from re-detaining Petitioner under 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(6) unless and until Respondents obtain a travel document for his removal;
3. Enjoin Respondents from re-detaining Petitioner without first following all procedures set forth in 8 C.F.R. §§ 241.4(*l*), 241.13(i), and any other applicable statutory and regulatory procedures;
4. Enjoin Respondents from removing Petitioner to any country other than Vietnam, unless they provide the following process, *see D.V.D. v. U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec.*, No. CV 25-10676-BEM, 2025 WL 1453640, at *1 (D. Mass. May 21, 2025):
    a. written notice to both Petitioner and Petitioner's counsel in a language Petitioner can understand;
    b. a meaningful opportunity, and a minimum of ten days, to raise a fear-based claim for CAT protection prior to removal;
    c. if Petitioner is found to have demonstrated "reasonable fear" of removal to the country, Respondents must move to reopen Petitioner's immigration proceedings;
    d. if Petitioner is not found to have demonstrated a "reasonable fear" of removal to the country, a meaningful opportunity, and a minimum of fifteen days, for the Petitioner to seek reopening of his immigration proceedings.
5. Order all other relief that the Court deems just and proper.

Conclusion

For those reasons, this Court should grant this habeas petition.

DATED: 10/25/2025

Respectfully submitted,

LIEM THANH LAM

Petitioner

Exhibit A

Liem Thanh Lam
[redacted]
Otay Mesa Detention Center
P.O. Box 439049
San Diego, CA 92143-9049

Pro Se[1]

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

LIEM THANH LAM,

Petitioner,

v.

KRISTI NOEM, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, PAMELA JO BONDI, Attorney General, TODD M. LYONS, Acting Director, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, JESUS ROCHA, Acting Field Office Director, San Diego Field Office, CHRISTOPHER LAROSE, Warden at Otay Mesa Detention Center,

Respondents.

CIVIL CASE NO.:

Declaration of Liem Thanh Lam in Support of Petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus

I, Liem Thanh Lam, declare:

1. I was born in Vietnam and came to the United States with my mother and two siblings in 1986. We were refugees fleeing from the communist regime in Vietnam. We all became lawful permanent residents.

2. In 2008, I was convicted of a federal offense.

[1] Mr. Lam is filing this motion and all associated documents with the assistance of the Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc. Federal Defenders has consistently used this procedure in seeking appointment for immigration habeas cases.

3. I was then ordered removed by a judge in 2010.

4. After the immigration judge ordered me removed, ICE tried to remove me. They released me after about three months.

5. For about 15 years, I have been on immigration supervision. I check-in every year. I did not miss appointments and did good on supervision.

6. ICE arrested me at my check in appointment on October 22, 2025. They did not tell me why I was being arrested. They did not explain any reasons to me. They did not ask me questions about why I should not be arrested. I was not given an interview.

7. Since my arrest, ICE has not come to talk to me about my detention or removal.

8. I have no legal education or training. I also do not have free access to the internet in custody. I speak English but it is limited.

9. I drove Uber. I have no savings. I have no money to pay for an attorney.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct, executed on 10/25/2025, in San Diego, California.

LIEM THANH LAM
Declarant

Exhibit B

PLAINTIFFS' EXHIBIT NO. 2
CASE NO. PX 25-951
IDENTIFICATION: JUL 10 2025
ADMITTED: JUL 10 2025

To All ICE Employees
July 9, 2025

Third Country Removals Following the Supreme Court's Order in *Department of Homeland Security v. D.V.D.*, No. 24A1153 (U.S. June 23, 2025)

On June 23, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court granted the Government's application to stay the district court's nationwide preliminary injunction in *D.V.D. v. Department of Homeland Security*, No. 25-10676, 2025 WL 1142968 (D. Mass. Apr. 18, 2025), which required certain procedures related to providing a "meaningful opportunity" to assert claims for protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) before initiating removal to a third country. Accordingly, all previous guidance implementing the district court's preliminary injunction related the third country removals issued in *D.V.D.* is hereby rescinded. Absent additional action by the Supreme Court, the stay will remain in place until any writ of certiorari is denied or a judgment following any decision issues.

Effective immediately, when seeking to remove an alien with a final order of removal—other than an expedited removal order under section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)—to an alternative country as identified in section 241(b)(1)(C) of the INA, ICE must adhere to Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem's March 30, 2025 memorandum, *Guidance Regarding Third Country Removals*, as detailed below. A "third country" or "alternative country" refers to a country other than that specifically referenced in the order of removal.

If the United States has received diplomatic assurances from the country of removal that aliens removed from the United States will not be persecuted or tortured, and if the Department of State believes those assurances to be credible, the alien may be removed without the need for further procedures. ICE will seek written confirmation from the Department of State that such diplomatic assurances were received and determined to be credible. HSI and ERO will be made aware of any such assurances. In all other cases, ICE must comply with the following procedures:

- An ERO officer will serve on the alien the attached Notice of Removal. The notice includes the intended country of removal and will be read to the alien in a language he or she understands.
- ERO will not affirmatively ask whether the alien is afraid of being removed to the country of removal.
- ERO will generally wait at least 24 hours following service of the Notice of Removal before effectuating removal. In exigent circumstances, ERO may execute a removal order six (6) or more hours after service of the Notice of Removal as long as the alien is provided reasonable means and opportunity to speak with an attorney prior to removal.
    - Any determination to execute a removal order under exigent circumstances less than 24 hours following service of the Notice of Removal must be approved by the DHS General Counsel, or the Principal Legal Advisor where the DHS General Counsel is not available.

- If the alien does not affirmatively state a fear of persecution or torture if removed to the country of removal listed on the Notice of Removal within 24 hours, ERO may proceed with removal to the country identified on the notice. ERO should check all systems for motions as close in time as possible to removal.
- If the alien does affirmatively state a fear if removed to the country of removal listed on the Notice of Removal, ERO will refer the case to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a screening for eligibility for protection under section 241(b)(3) of the INA and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). USCIS will generally screen the alien within 24 hours of referral.
    - USCIS will determine whether the alien would more likely than not be persecuted on a statutorily protected ground or tortured in the country of removal.
    - If USCIS determines that the alien has not met this standard, the alien will be removed.
    - If USCIS determines that the alien has met this standard and the alien was not previously in proceedings before the immigration court, USCIS will refer the matter to the immigration court for further proceedings. In cases where the alien was previously in proceedings before the immigration court, USCIS will notify the referring immigration officer of its finding, and the immigration officer will inform ICE. In such cases, ERO will alert their local Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA) Field Location to file a motion to reopen with the immigration court or the Board of Immigration Appeals, as appropriate, for further proceedings for the sole purpose of determining eligibility for protection under section 241(b)(3) of the INA and CAT for the country of removal. Alternatively, ICE may choose to designate another country for removal.

Notably, the Supreme Court's stay of removal does not alter any decisions issued by any other courts as to individual aliens regarding the process that must be provided before removing that alien to a third country.

Please direct any questions about this guidance to your OPLA field location.

Thank you for all you continue to do for the agency.

Todd M. Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Attachments:

- U.S. Supreme Court Order
- Secretary Noem's Memorandum
- Notice of Removal

PROOF OF SERVICE

I, the undersigned, caused to be served the within Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus by email, at the request of Janet Cabral, Chief of the Civil Division, to:

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California
Civil Division
Janet.Cabral@usdoj.gov

Date: November 13, 2025

/s/ *Zandra L. Lopez*
Zandra L. Lopez