

United States District Court
Western District of Texas
El Paso Division

Seamus Thomas Culleton,
Petitioner,

v.

Mary De Anda-Ybarra, Field Office Director,
Enforcement and Removal, U.S. Immigration
and Customs Enforcement, *et. al.*

Respondents.

No. 3:25-cv-00554-KC

**Response in Opposition to
Petitioner's Writ of Habeas Corpus Petition**

STATEMENT OF ISSUES

1. Whether Petitioner is subject to a Final Order of Administrative Removal.
2. Whether an application for adjustment of status is a defense to removal in Visa Waiver Program Proceedings.
3. Whether the Court has jurisdiction to rule on the petition.

Respondents timely submit this response per this Court's Order dated November 17, 2025, directing service and ordering a response on December 1, 2025. *See* ECF No. 5 at. In his petition, Mr. Culleton requests release from civil immigration detention, claiming that his detention is contrary to statute, the Due Process Clause, the APA, and the Fourt Amendment. *See* ECF No. 4. Petitioner's claims lack merit and are unsupported by Fifth Circuit precedent. This petition should be denied.

Mr. Culleton is not entitled to release, because he is subject to a removal order over which he has already waived judicial review. *See* INA 217, 8 U.S.C. 1187. Under 1187(a)(1), an individual seeking admission under the Visa Waiver Program ("VWP") applies for admission as a nonimmigrant and is provided with a waiver of the visa requirement, subject to certain conditions. 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(7)(B)(i)(II); *see McCarthy v. Mukasey*, 555 F.3d 450, 459–60 (5th Cir. 2009). The VWP allows qualifying aliens of designated countries to enter the United States temporarily for up to 90 days without first obtaining a visa. 8 USC 1187. To benefit from the VWP, however, the alien must waive the right to contest any action for removal, other than on the basis of an application asylum. 8 USC 1187(b)(2). Removal of such an alien "shall be effected without referral ... to an immigration judge for a determination of deportability." 8 C.F.R. 217.4(b).

Generally, a VWP overstay may not contest a removal action on the basis that he has filed an adjustment of status application (Form I-485). *See, e.g., Nose v. Att'y Gen.*, 993 F.2d 75 (5th Cir. 1993). More importantly the Fifth Circuit has a case directly on point. The Fifth Circuit has held that aliens cannot circumvent the unambiguous language of 8 U.S.C. § 1187 by subsequently applying of an adjustment of status. *McCarthy v. Mukasey*, 555 F.3d 459, 462 (5th Cir. 2009). Whether to pause removal for that purpose is within the sole discretion of the Department of Homeland Security. *See Adjustment of Status for VWP Entrants PM*, at 2 (last accessed July 10,

2025); *Singh v. Cole*, No. 1:20–CV–763–P, 2020 WL 7655276 at *3–*8 (W.D. La. Nov. 17, 2020) (collecting cases). While the district court has jurisdiction under 2241 to review a custody challenge, the court lacks jurisdiction to review any issues directly related to a VWP removal order. *See Vargas v. U.S. Dep’t of Homeland Sec.*, No. 1:17–CV–356, 2017 WL 962420 at *2–3 (W.D. La. Nov. 10, 2017).

I. Facts and Procedural History

Petitioner is a native and citizen of Ireland. ECF No. 1 at ¶ 1. Petitioner entered lawfully on a tourist visa on March 1, 2009. ECF No. 1 at ¶ 1. Petitioner never departed the United States since his arrival. ECF No. 1 at ¶ 1. In March 2025, Petitioner applied to adjust status. ECF No. 2 at ¶. On September 9, 2025, ICE ERO encountered Petitioner in Massachusetts and detained him. ECF No. 1 at ¶ 3. On September 10, 2025, ICE issued Petitioner a Notice to Alien Ordered Removed/Departure Verification through the Visa Waiver Program. *See* Exhibit A (VWP Removal Documents). On November 14, 2025, ICE served a copy of the Final Administrative Order of Removal. *See* Exhibit A (VWP Removal Documents).

II. Relevant Law

A. Detention Is Lawful Under 8 U.S.C. §§ 1187 and 1231(a)(6).

Petitioner is subject to a final order under the VWP. 8 U.S.C. § 1187. The general authority to detain aliens after the entry of a final order of removal is set forth in 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a). That statute affords ICE a 90-day mandatory detention period within which to remove the alien from the United States following the entry of the final order. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(2). The 90-day removal period begins on the latest of three dates: the date (1) the order becomes “administratively final,” (2) a court issues a final order in a stay of removal, or (3) the alien is released from non-

immigration custody. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(B).

Not all removals can be accomplished in 90 days, and certain aliens may be detained beyond the 90-day removal period. *See Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 701 (2001). Under § 1231, the removal period can be extended in at least three circumstances. *See Glushchenko v. U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec.*, 566 F.Supp.3d 693, 703 (W.D. Tex. 2021). Extension is warranted, for example, if the alien presents a flight risk or other risk to the community. *Id.*; *see also* 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(C); (a)(6). An alien may be held in confinement until there is “no significant likelihood of removal in a reasonably foreseeable future.” *Zadvydas*, at 533 U.S. at 680.

B. Petitioner Has a Final Order of Administrative Removal Lawfully Issued Under 8 U.S.C. § 1187.

Petitioner is not entitled to release, because he is subject to a final removal order that he waived his rights to contest. *See* INA § 217, 8 U.S.C. § 1187. Under § 1187(a)(1), an individual seeking admission to the United States under VWP applies for admission as a nonimmigrant and is provided with a waiver of the visa requirement, subject to certain conditions. 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(7)(B)(i)(II); *see McCarthy v. Mukasey*, 555 F.3d 450, 459–60 (5th Cir. 2009). The VWP allows qualifying aliens of designated countries to enter the United States temporarily for up to 90 days. 8 U.S.C. § 1187. To benefit from the VWP, however, the alien must waive the right to contest any action for removal, unless he is requesting asylum. 8 U.S.C. § 1187(b)(2). Removal of such an alien “shall be effected without referral ... to an immigration judge....” 8 C.F.R. § 217.4(b).

This necessarily means that an alien who remains in the United States longer than the time allotted to him under the VWP may not contest a removal action. While the district court has habeas jurisdiction under § 2241 to review a custody challenge, the court lacks jurisdiction to review any issues directly related to a VWP removal order. *See Vargas v. U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec.*, No. 1:17–CV–356, 2017 WL 962420 at *2–3 (W.D. La. Nov. 10, 2017).

The authority to detain aliens subject to an administrative removal order under 8 U.S.C. § 1187 is found within the statute itself. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1187(c)(2)(E). Petitioner argues in error that ICE is holding him pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1226. *See* ECF No. 1 at ¶24. The record shows, however, that ICE notified Petitioner of the intent to issue a final administrative order of removal under the VWP. Exh. A (VWP Removal Documents). The records further show that Petitioner acknowledged service and refused to apply for asylum and his only objection to removability was based on his pending adjustment of status application. *Id.* Said application, is not a defense to removal under the VWP process. *see McCarthy v. Mukasey*, 555 F.3d 450, 459–60 (5th Cir. 2009). As such, he is subject to a final order of removal. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1187(c)(2)(E).

III. Argument

A. Petitioner’s Detention Comports with Due Process.

It is uncontested that Petitioner has been in ICE custody since September 2025. ECF No. 1 at ¶ 3. On or about November 14, 2025, ICE issued and served Petitioner with a final administrative order of removal under the VWP. Exh. A (VWP Removal Documents). The VWP statute plainly states that a participating VWP country must, within three weeks of issuance of a final order, accept the repatriation of any citizen, former citizen, or national of that country against whom that final order is issued. 8 U.S.C. § 1187(c)(2)(E). The statute cautions, however, that there is no duty owed by the United States or any right owed to the alien with respect to removal or release under this provision. *Id.* The statute further notes that the statute creates no cause of action or claim against a United States official “to compel the release, removal, or consideration for release or removal of any alien.” *Id.* In other words, the statute mandates Petitioner’s detention until his removal is executed.

Courts typically review due process claims regarding immigration detention under

Zadvydas v. Davis, 533 U.S. 678, 701 (2001).¹ The *Zadvydas* court reviewed the constitutionality of final order detention as authorized by 8 U.S.C. § 1231. Under § 1231, the first 90 days following the entry of the removal order subjects the alien to mandatory detention. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a). The removal period can be extended in a least three circumstances. See *Glushchenko v. U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec.*, 566 F.Supp.3d 693, 703 (W.D. Tex. 2021). Extension is warranted, for example, if the alien presents a flight risk or other risk to the community, or if he fails to comply with removal efforts. *Id.*; see also 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(C); (a)(6). An alien may be held in confinement until there is “no significant likelihood of removal in a reasonably foreseeable future.” *Zadvydas*, at 533 U.S. at 680.

The 90-day removal period may also be extended where ICE determines the alien is unlikely to comply with the removal order. See *Johnson v. Guzman-Chavez*, 594 U.S. 523, 528–29, 544 (2021); see also 8 C.F.R. § 1231(a)(6); 8 C.F.R. § 241.4. Continued detention under this provision is the “post-removal-period.” *Guzman-Chavez*, 594 U.S. at 529. The statute does not specify a time limit on this post-removal period, but the Supreme Court has read an implicit limitation into the statute and held that the alien may be detained only for a period reasonably necessary to remove the alien from the United States. *Id.*; 8 C.F.R. § 241.13. Six months is the presumptively reasonable timeframe in the post-removal context. *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701. Although the Court recognized this presumptive period, *Zadvydas* “creates no specific limits on detention . . . as ‘an alien may be held in confinement until it has been determined that there is no significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future.’” *Andrade v. Gonzales*, 459 F.3d 538, 543 (5th Cir. 2006) (quoting *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 701).

¹ Respondents do not concede that *Zadvydas*, as opposed to *Thuraissigiam*, for example, is the proper analysis to determine the constitutionality of final order detention under the VWP.

To state a claim for relief under *Zadvydas*, Petitioner would have to show that: (1) he is in DHS custody; (2) he has a final order of removal; (3) he has been detained in *post*-removal-order detention for six months or longer; and (4) there is no significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future. *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 700. Petitioner does not even allege that he has a final order of removal, but even if he had, there is no dispute that he has been detained less than 90 days in DHS custody. As such, any claim under *Zadvydas* is premature.² Moreover, Petitioner has not shown good cause to believe that Petitioner’s removal to the Ireland is unlikely. Therefore, even under *Zadvydas*, Petitioner’s post-order detention comports with due process. This habeas should be denied.

B. 8 U.S.C. § 1252(g) Strips the Court of Jurisdiction to Provide the Relief Sought.

Section 1252(g) precludes review of Petitioner’s claims because he directly challenges ICE’s decision to execute an administratively final order of removal under VWP. “Judicial review in the removal context is heavily circumscribed by 8 U.S.C. § 1252.” *Duron v. Johnson*, 894 F.3d 644, 646 (5th Cir. 2018). Except as provided in § 1252, courts “cannot entertain challenges to the enumerated executive branch decisions or actions.” *E.F.L. v. Prim*, 986 F.3d 959, 964–65 (7th Cir.

² Petitioner has been detained in ICE custody for less than six months, meaning that any claim filed under *Zadvydas* to challenge the constitutionality of his post-order detention is premature. In *Zadvydas*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that § 1231(a)(6) “read in light of the Constitution’s demands, limits an alien’s post-removal-period detention to a period reasonably necessary to bring about that alien’s removal from the United States” but “does not permit indefinite detention.” 533 U.S. at 689. “[O]nce removal is no longer reasonably foreseeable, continued detention is no longer authorized by the statute.” *Id.* at 699. The Court designated six months as a presumptively reasonable period of post-order detention but made clear that the presumption “does not mean that every alien not removed must be released after six months.” *Id.* at 701. Once the alien establishes that he has been in post-order custody for more than six months at the time the habeas petition is filed, the alien must provide a “good reason” to believe that there is no significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future. See *Andrade*, 459 F.3d at 543–44; *Gonzalez v. Gills*, No. 20–60547, 2022 WL 1056099 at *1 (5th Cir. Apr. 8, 2022). Unless the alien establishes the requisite “good reason,” the burden will not shift to the government to prove otherwise. *Id.*

2021).

Section 1252(g) specifically deprives courts of jurisdiction, including habeas corpus jurisdiction, to review “any cause or claim by or on behalf of an alien arising from the decision or action by the Attorney General to [1] commence proceedings, [2] adjudicate cases, or [3] *execute removal orders* against any alien under this chapter.” 8 U.S.C. § 1252(g) (emphasis added); *Reno v. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Comm.*, 525 U.S. 471, 482 (1999).

This jurisdictional bar has been applied in the Western District of Texas and in the Fifth Circuit multiple times. *See* ECF No. 28 at 5 n.18.; *see also Leger v. Young*, 464 F. App’x 352, 353, 2012 WL 874560 at *1 (5th Cir. 2012) (citing *Humphries v. Various Fed. USINS Emps.*, 164 F.3d 936, 943 (5th Cir. 1999); *Idokogi v. Ashcroft*, 66 F. App’x. 526, 2003 WL 21018263 (5th Cir. 2003) (per curiam); *Fabuluje v. Immigration and Naturalization Agency*, 244 F.3d 133 (5th Cir. 2000); *Olya v. Garite*, EP–25–CV–00083–DCG, 2025 WL 890180 at *1 (W.D. Tex. Mar. 19, 2025) (citing *Moreira v. Mukasey*, 509 F.3d 709, 712 (5th Cir. 2007)). These cases support the government’s position that this Court lacks jurisdiction to provide the relief Petitioner seeks.

Given the plethora of decisions finding consistently that § 1252(g) strips courts of jurisdiction to enjoin the government’s execution of a final order of removal, this Court should find the same. Section 1252(g) deprives this Court of providing Petitioner the relief he seeks, even if that relief is sought only for a limited time pending a final ruling on the Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus.

C. To the Extent Petitioner Challenges the Constitutionality of His Removal Order, such a Claim Must Be Filed with the Circuit Courts of Appeals.

Even if Petitioner raises a colorable claim here regarding the constitutionality of Petitioner’s VWP removal order and his resulting decision, that claim must be brought in the circuit court in a petition for review. *See, e.g.*, 8 U.S.C. § 1252(a)(2)(D). The habeas petition in this case

fails to allege any facial or as-applied challenge to the constitutionality of Petitioner’s final order of removal under the VWP. *See* ECF No. 1 at 9-12. Indeed, Petitioner did not challenge any aspect of his removal process under the VWP. Even if Petitioner had properly stated a constitutional challenge to the VWP, this Court lacks jurisdiction to review it, as it must be properly funneled to the Fifth Circuit. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9).

Under § 1252(b)(9), “judicial review of all questions of law . . . including interpretation and application of statutory provisions . . . arising from any action taken . . . to remove an alien from the United States” is only proper before the appropriate federal court of appeals in the form of a petition for review of a final removal order. *See Reno v. AAADC*, 525 U.S. at 483. Section 1252(b)(9) is an “unmistakable ‘zipper’ clause” that “channels judicial review of all [claims arising from deportation proceedings]” to a court of appeals in the first instance. *Id.*; *see also El Gamal v. Noem*, --- F.Supp.3d---, 2025 WL 1857593 at *5 (W.D. Tex. July 2, 2025) (collecting cases and finding that any challenge to ICE’s initial decision to detain the alien during removal proceedings is protected from judicial review in district court, because the alien must appeal any order of removal to the BIA and ultimately petition for judicial review of any relevant constitutional claims by the court of appeals); *Lopez v. Barr*, No. CV 20-1330 (JRT/BRT), 2021 WL 195523, at *2 (D. Minn. Jan. 20, 2021) (citing *Nasrallah v. Barr*, 590 U.S. 573, 579–80 (2020)).

§ 1252(a)(5) provides that a petition for review is the exclusive means for judicial review of immigration proceedings. 8 U.S.C. § 1252(a)(5). “Taken together, § 1252(a)(5) and § 1252(b)(9) mean that any issue—whether legal or factual—arising from any removal-related activity can be reviewed only through the [petition-for-review] process.” *J.E.F.M. v. Lynch*, 837 F.3d 1026, 1031 (9th Cir. 2016) (emphasis in original); *see id.* at 1035 (“§§ 1252(a)(5) and [(b)(9)] channel review of all claims, including policies-and-practices challenges . . . whenever they ‘arise

from' removal proceedings"); accord *Ruiz v. Mukasey*, 552 F.3d 269, 274 n.3 (2d Cir. 2009) (only when the action is "unrelated to any removal action or proceeding" is it within the district court's jurisdiction); cf. *Xiao Ji Chen v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 434 F.3d 144, 151 n.3 (2d Cir. 2006) (a "primary effect" of the REAL ID Act is to "limit all aliens to one bite of the apple" (internal quotation marks omitted)).

Critically, "[§] 1252(b)(9) is a judicial channeling provision, not a claim-barring one." *Aguilar v. ICE*, 510 F.3d 1, 11 (1st Cir. 2007). Indeed, § 1252(a)(2)(D) provides that "[n]othing . . . in any other provision of this chapter . . . shall be construed as precluding review of constitutional claims or questions of law raised upon a petition for review filed with an appropriate court of appeals in accordance with this section." See also *Ajlani v. Chertoff*, 545 F.3d 229, 235 (2d Cir. 2008) ("[J]urisdiction to review such claims is vested exclusively in the courts of appeals[.]"). The petition-for-review process before the court of appeals ensures that aliens have a proper forum for claims arising from their immigration proceedings and "receive their day in court." *J.E.F.M.*, 837 F.3d at 1031–32 (internal quotations omitted); see also *Rosario v. Holder*, 627 F.3d 58, 61 (2d Cir. 2010) ("The REAL ID Act of 2005 amended the [INA] to obviate . . . Suspension Clause concerns" by permitting judicial review of "nondiscretionary" BIA determinations and "all constitutional claims or questions of law."). These provisions divest district courts of jurisdiction to review both direct and indirect challenges to removal orders, including decisions to detain for purposes of removal or for proceedings. See *Jennings*, 583 U.S. at 294–95 (section 1252(b)(9) includes challenges to the "decision to detain [an alien] in the first place or to seek removal[.]").

Here, Petitioner challenges in district court the government's decision to detain him for the purpose of executing his removal order under the statutes governing the VWP. These actions, however, were taken specifically for the purpose of removing him from the United States, and

therefore, they must be challenged only in the court of appeals. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9); *see also, e.g., Jennings*, 583 U.S. at 294–95.

Indeed, ICE gave Petitioner an opportunity to contest the VWP removal order, but Petitioner did not seek asylum. *See* Exhibit A (VWP Removal Documents). All he has challenged is his removability, based on the grounds that he has an adjustment of status application pending with USCIS. A pending adjustment is not a defense to a VWP removal. *See McCarthy v. Mukasey*, 555 F.3d 459, 462 (5th Cir. 2009). Additionally, he can have seek review through the Fifth Circuit. *See, e.g., Patel v. Barr*, No. CV–20–00229–PHX–DLR (DMF), 2020 WL 12688142 at *14–15 (D. Ariz. Sept. 9, 2020) (analyzing *Thuraissigiam’s* impact on the habeas claim of a VWP entrant). Refusing to sign the acknowledgment of service or otherwise waiving the right to contest that removal order does not restore jurisdiction in the district court under § 1252.

Indeed, the fact that Petitioner is challenging initial detention here is enough to trigger § 1252(b)(9) because “detention is an ‘action taken . . . to remove’ an alien.” *See Jennings*, 583 U.S. 318, 319 (Thomas, J., concurring); 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9). In other words, to the extent that Petitioner challenges the legality of the final order of removal under the VWP and resulting detention, those claims are properly raised only through the appropriate federal court of appeals. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9). Petitioner is lawfully detained with a final order of removal issued under the VWP, and this Court lacks jurisdiction to stay his removal order. *See* INA § 217, 8 U.S.C. § 1187.

IV. Conclusion

Petitioner has been detained less than 90 days, and continued detention until removal is lawful. Fifth Circuit is precedent directly on point, and controlling in this matter. *McCarthy v. Mukasey*, 555 F.3d 459, 462 (5th Cir. 2009). Accordingly, the Court should deny this petition.

Respectfully submitted,

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