

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
HOUSTON DIVISION

CARLOS RIOS LOPEZ,

Petitioner,

v.

PAM BONDI, *et al.*,

Respondents.

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Civil Action No. 4:25-CV-05787

**THE FEDERAL RESPONDENTS' MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT  
AND RESPONSE TO THE PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS**

Respectfully submitted,

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

Respondents Pamela Bondi, Kristi Noem, Todd Lyons, Mathew Baker, and John Linscott (hereinafter, the “Federal Respondents”)<sup>1</sup> hereby request that the Court deny the petition for writ of habeas corpus and grant summary judgment in the Government’s favor, in accordance with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56.

This case asks whether an alien present in the United States who has never been admitted is subject to mandatory detention pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). This challenge to the mandatory detention framework must fail on the merits as a plain reading of 8 U.S.C. § 1225 instructs that Petitioner is subject to mandatory detention. As an alien who has not been admitted into the United States, Petitioner is an “applicant for admission” and therefore “shall be detained” during the pendency of his removal proceedings. 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). This Court should rule in favor of the Government on this issue and deny Petitioner’s habeas petition, as multiple other district courts in the Fifth Circuit alone have done. *See, e.g., Cabanas v. Bondi*, No. 4:25-CV-04830, 2025 WL 3171331 (S.D. Tex. Nov. 13, 2025) (Eskridge, J.); *Garibay-Robledo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-CV-00177, -- F.Supp.3d --, 2025 WL 3264482 (N.D. Tex. Sept. 15, 2025) (Hendrix, J.); *Sandoval v. Acuna*, No. 6:25-CV-01467, 2025 WL 3048926 (W.D. La. Oct. 31, 2025) (Joseph, J.); *Topal v. Bondi*, No. 1:25-CV-01612, 2025 WL 3486894 (W.D. La. Dec. 3, 2025) (Doughty, J.).

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<sup>1</sup> The proper respondent in a habeas petition is the person with custody over the petitioner. 28 U.S.C. § 2242; *see also id.* § 2243; *Rumsfeld v. Padilla*, 542 U.S. 426, 435 (2004). That said, it is the Federal Respondents, not the named warden in this case, who makes the custodial decisions regarding aliens detained in immigration custody under Title 8 of the United States Code. Therefore, while the named warden is the proper party in form, the Federal Respondents respond herein as the real party in interest.

## II. BACKGROUND

As Petitioner Carlos Rios Lopez himself concedes, he is a native and citizen of Mexico who entered the United States without inspection. Dkt. No. 1 ¶¶ 6, 12. Lopez came into ICE custody on the heels of a conviction for Obstructing a Highway or Passageway on November 21, 2025, for which he served time and then was subsequently transferred to ICE custody. *Id.* ¶ 13. He has been served with a Notice to Appear (“NTA”) charging him with removability pursuant to Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”) section 212(a)(6)(A)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(6)(A)(i), as an alien present in the United States without being admitted or paroled, or who arrived in the United States at any time or place other than as designated by the Attorney General. *Id.* ¶ 15. In the NTA, the examining immigration official determined that Petitioner was not entitled to admission, explained the basis for charging Petitioner with being subject to removal, and ordered Petitioner to appear in immigration court. *See* Exhibit 1 (attached).

On December 1, 2025, an immigration judge denied Petitioner’s bond request, rightfully determining it lacked jurisdiction because Petitioner’s detention was governed by INA § 235(b)(2)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). Dkt. No. 1 ¶ 17. Petitioner now brings this habeas claim asserting that his detention is unlawful because he falls under the INA’s discretionary detention provision. For the following reasons, the Court should grant summary judgment in favor of the Government and deny the habeas petition.

## III. LEGAL STANDARD ON SUMMARY JUDGMENT

Generally, summary judgment is proper when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P.

56(a). If the moving party meets its burden of demonstrating the absence of a genuine factual dispute, the non-movant must then come forward with specific facts showing there is a genuine issue for trial. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c); *Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp.*, 475 U.S. 574, 586–87, 106 S.Ct. 1348, 89 L.Ed.2d 538 (1986). The non-movant must “go beyond the pleadings and by [the nonmovant’s] own affidavits, or by the depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, designate specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial.” *Nola Spice Designs, LLC v. Haydel Enters., Inc.*, 783 F.3d 527, 536 (5th Cir. 2015). The non-movant’s burden “will not be satisfied by ‘some metaphysical doubt as to the material facts, by conclusory allegations, by unsubstantiated assertions, or by only a scintilla of evidence.’” *Boudreaux v. Swift Transp. Co.*, 402 F.3d 536, 540 (5th Cir. 2005) (quoting *Little v. Liquid Air Corp.*, 37 F.3d 1069, 1075 (5th Cir. 1994) (en banc) (per curiam)).

#### IV. APPLICABLE LAW

In a petition for a writ of habeas corpus, the petitioner is challenging the legality of the restraint or imprisonment. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2241. The burden is on the petitioner to show the confinement is unlawful. *See, e.g., Walker v. Johnston*, 312 U.S. 275, 286, 61 S.Ct. 574, 85 L.Ed. 830 (1941). When it comes to detention during removal proceedings, it is well-taken that the authority to detain is elemental to the authority to deport, as “[d]etention is necessary a part of th[e] deportation procedure.” *Carlson v. Landon*, 342 U.S. 524, 538, 72 S.Ct. 525, 96 L.Ed. 547 (1952); *see Wong Wing v. United States*, 163 U.S. 228, 235, 16 S.Ct. 977, 41 L.Ed. 140 (1896) (“Proceedings to exclude or expel would be vain if those accused could not be held in custody pending the inquiry into their true character, and while arrangements were being made for their deportation.”). As Supreme Court has stated in no unmistakable terms, “Detention

during removal proceedings is a constitutionally permissible part of that process.” *Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 531, 123 S.Ct. 1708, 155 L.Ed.2d 724 (2003).

With this backdrop in mind, the Federal Respondents proceed to the statutory text on mandatory versus discretionary detention.

**A. MANDATORY DETENTION UNDER 8 U.S.C. § 1225**

Section 1225 defines “applicants for admission” as “alien[s] present in the United States who ha[ve] not been admitted” or “who arrive[] in the United States.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1). Applicants for admission “fall into one of two categories, those covered by § 1225(b)(1) and those covered by § 1225(b)(2).” *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, 583 U.S. 281, 287, 138 S.Ct. 830, 200 L.Ed.2d 122 (2018).

Section 1225(b)(1) applies to arriving aliens and “certain other” aliens “initially determined to be inadmissible due to fraud, misrepresentation, or lack of valid documentation.” *Id.*; 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1)(A)(i), (iii). These aliens are generally subject to expedited removal proceedings. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1)(A)(i).

In contrast to Section 1225(b)(1) which deals with arriving aliens, Section 1225(b)(2) is “broader” and “serves as a catchall provision.” *Jennings*, 583 U.S. at 287. It “applies to all applicants for admission not covered by § 1225(b)(1).” *Id.* Under § 1225(b)(2), an alien “who is an applicant for admission” *shall* be detained for a removal proceeding “if the examining immigration officer determines that [the] alien seeking admission is not clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to be admitted.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) (emphasis added).

**B. DISCRETIONARY DETENTION UNDER 8 U.S.C. § 1226**

Section 1226 is the more general detention statute, and it provides that an alien may be arrested and detained “pending a decision on whether the alien is to be removed from the United States.” 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a). Under § 1226(a), the government may detain an alien during his removal proceedings, release him on bond, or release him on conditional parole. By regulation, immigration officers has discretion to release an alien who demonstrates that he “would not pose a danger to property or persons” and “is likely to appear for any future proceeding.” 8 C.F.R. § 236.1(c)(8). An alien can also request a custody redetermination (i.e., a bond hearing) by an IJ at any time before a final order of removal is issued. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a); 8 C.F.R. §§ 236.1(d)(1), 1236.1(d)(1), 1003.19.

At a custody redetermination, the IJ may continue detention or release the alien on bond or conditional parole. 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a); 8 C.F.R. § 1236.1(d)(1). IJs have broad discretion in deciding whether to release an alien on bond. *In re Guerra*, 24 I. & N. Dec. 37, 39–40 (BIA 2006) (listing nine factors for IJs to consider). But regardless of the factors IJs consider, an alien “who presents a danger to persons or property should not be released during the pendency of removal proceedings.” *Id.* at 38.

**C. BIA REVIEW**

The BIA is an appellate body within the Executive Office for Immigration Review (“EOIR”). *See* 8 C.F.R. § 1003.1(d)(1). BIA members possess delegated authority from the Attorney General. 8 C.F.R. § 1003.1(a)(1). The BIA is “charged with the review of those administrative adjudications under the [INA] that the Attorney General may by regulation assign to it,” including IJ custody determinations. 8 C.F.R. §§ 1003.1(d)(1), 236.1; 1236.1. The

BIA not only resolves particular disputes before it, but also “through precedent decisions, [it] shall provide clear and uniform guidance to DHS, the immigration judges, and the general public on the proper interpretation and administration of the [INA] and its implementing regulations.” *Id.* § 1003.1(d)(1). “The decision of the [BIA] shall be final except in those cases reviewed by the Attorney General.” 8 C.F.R. § 1003.1(d)(7).

On September 5, 2025, the BIA issued a unanimous precedential decision in *Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, 29 I. & N. Dec. 216 (BIA 2025). In that decision, the BIA held that IJs lack authority to hear a respondent’s request for bond where the respondent is an applicant for admission as such aliens are subject to mandatory detention under Section 235(b)(2)(A) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A), and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 235.3(b)(1)(ii). *Hurtado*, 29 I. & N. Dec. at 229.

## V. ARGUMENT

Petitioner styles his habeas petition as six claims, but his central claim is (or at least should be) Count One, which argues that he is entitled to a bond hearing because the mandatory detention provision (8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A)) has been incorrectly applied to him, and he instead should fall under the discretionary detention provision (8 U.S.C. § 1226(a)). *See* Dkt No. 1 at 20. In addition to that claim, he asserts five other ancillary arguments under the APA (Count II), Due Process Clause (Counts III and IV), Suspension Clause (Count V), and Declaratory Judgment Act (Count VI).

The Federal Respondents first briefly address each of Counts II–VI, which can each be summarily disposed of, before turning to Petitioner’s central claim, Count I, regarding the applicable detention statute.

**A. COUNT II: APA**

Petitioner alleges that his detention violates the APA because the reasoning of the BIA's decision in *Hurtado* was arbitrary and capricious. This claim is an improper vehicle through which to vindicate his substantive legal claims when he is already in the proper vehicle: a petition for a writ of habeas corpus. The APA itself instructs that claims under the APA are available only when "there is no other adequate remedy in a court." 5 U.S.C. § 704. It is well-taken that "28 U.S.C. § 2241 provides a district court with jurisdiction over petitions for habeas corpus where a petitioner is 'in custody in violation of the Constitution or law or treaties of the United States.'" *Vazquez Barrera v. Wolf*, 455 F.Supp.3d 330, 336 (S.D. Tex. 2020) (Ellison, J.) (citing 28 U.S.C. § 2241(c)(3); *INS v. St. Cyr*, 533 U.S. 289, 305, 121 S.Ct. 2271, 150 L.Ed.2d 347 (2001)). To the extent Petitioner's detention is unlawful, whether it be by way of statute, regulation, the Constitution, or otherwise, he can already challenge the legality of his detention via his habeas petition.<sup>2</sup> Thus, his APA claim is functionally duplicative and cannot maintain as there is already an "adequate remedy." 5 U.S.C. § 704. Very recently, the Supreme Court directly addressed this point where it was faced with a habeas corpus proceeding which also purported to bring the same claims via the APA. The Supreme Court concluded that because the claims challenge the validity of confinement, the claims "must be brought in habeas." *Trump v. J.G.G.*, 604 U.S. 670, 672, 145 S.Ct. 1003, 221 L.Ed.2d 529 (2025). Justice Kavanaugh further explained why this is so in his concurrence: because "habeas corpus, not the APA, is

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<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Petitioner himself would be better served for the issue as to the relevant detention authority to be considered in habeas, as opposed to an arbitrary-and-capricious challenge under the APA, given the latter would in fact impose on him a higher burden of persuasion.

the proper vehicle” given that the APA is only available where no other adequate remedy is available. *Id.* at 674.

In sum, each of Petitioner’s arguments here as to why his detention is unlawful—that is, his challenges under the applicable federal detention statutes—can already be brought through a habeas petition (which is precisely how he has proceeded here), which makes the APA an improper vehicle. The APA claim must be dismissed.<sup>3</sup>

**B. COUNTS III AND IV: DUE PROCESS**

Counts III and IV assert violations of procedural and substantive due process: the former on the theory that detention without a bond hearing is unlawful, and the latter on the theory that the detention itself is unlawful. Both these points can be swiftly rejected.

As to both arguments, it is well-settled that detention during the pendency of removal proceedings presents no constitutional infirmities, such as due process concerns. This argument is addressed by the Federal Respondents’ earlier discussion, *see supra* Part IV, as to the propriety of detention during removal proceedings. *See, e.g., Carlson*, 342 U.S. at 538 (“Detention is necessary a part of th[e] deportation procedure.”); *Wong Wing*, 163 U.S. at 235 (“Proceedings to exclude or expel would be vain if those accused could not be held in custody pending the inquiry into their true character, and while arrangements were being made for their deportation.”). As Supreme Court has stated in no unmistakable terms, “Detention during removal proceedings is a constitutionally permissible part of that process.” *Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 531, 123 S.Ct. 1708, 155 L.Ed.2d 724 (2003).

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<sup>3</sup> To be sure, even if the APA were a proper vehicle here, the claim would still fail as a matter of law as it is premised on a violation of the federal detention statutes, which Petitioner cannot show.

In *Demore*, the Supreme Court explained that such detention was permissible in light of “th[e] fundamental premise of immigration law” that “[i]n the exercise of its broad power over naturalization and immigration, Congress regularly makes rules that would be unacceptable if applied to citizens.” 538 U.S. at 521. Notably, the Supreme Court rejected the application of *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 121 S.Ct. 2491, 150 L.Ed.2d 653 (2001), to removal proceedings, reiterating its “longstanding view that the Government may constitutionally detain deportable aliens during the limited period necessary for their removal proceedings[.]” *Demore*, 538 U.S. at 526. It explicitly distinguished this type of detention—that is, detention during removal proceedings—with post-removal-order detention, which is governed by *Zadvydas*; in so doing, the Supreme Court held that *Zadvydas* does not extend to detention during removal proceedings and explained why. *See id.* at 527–31.

Of note, Petitioner’s argument amounts to a claim that mandatory detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A)—and thus that provision itself—violates the Due Process Clause of the Constitution.<sup>4</sup> As Judge Eskridge recently explained when considering and rejecting this very argument, while post-removal period detention under *Zadvydas* “require[es] a constitutional constraint on unbounded detention,” detention pending a determination of removability “is a constitutional part of [the removal] process.” *Jimenez v. Thompson*, 4:25-CV-05026, 2025 WL 3265493, at \*1 (S.D. Tex. Nov. 24, 2025) (quoting *Demore*, 538 U.S. at 531).

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<sup>4</sup> The mandatory detention provision provides for just that: mandatory detention. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). If Petitioner’s argument is that his detention without bond under that statute is a violation of due process, he is necessarily making the claim that the mandatory detention statute itself is unconstitutional; after all, the statute does not merely permit detention, the statute requires it. Petitioner has failed to identify, and undersigned counsel is unaware, of a single case holding that 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) is unconstitutional (as opposed to merely inapplicable in certain contexts, as a statutory matter).

He observed that the Supreme Court in *Zadydas* explicitly distinguished post-removal-period detention from detention during removal proceedings, finding the latter permissible. *Id.*; see also *Zi v. Gillis*, No. 5:19-CV-00150, 2020 WL 7390488, at \*2 (S.D. Miss. Oct. 6, 2020) (“*Zadydas* does not apply to Petitioner as he is currently detained pending removal proceedings.”). By Petitioner’s line of argument, 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) would have to itself be unconstitutional on its face.<sup>5</sup> There is no support for such an argument.

**C. COUNT V: SUSPENSION CLAUSE**

Petitioner’s fifth claim is peculiar, as he invokes the Suspension Clause in arguing that this constitutional provision guarantees that the writ of habeas corpus cannot be suspended unless during times of rebellion or invasion. But the Government does not purport that the writ has been suspended. This “claim” is a non-issue.

**D. COUNT VI: DECLARATORY JUDGMENT**

Petitioner asserts a claim for declaratory judgment pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2201. Petitioner’s invocation of this statute as a standalone claim is misguided, as declaratory judgment is not an independent cause of action but rather a form of relief based on underlying claims. See, e.g., *Collin Cnty., Tex. v. Homeowners Ass’n for Values Essential to Neighborhoods, (HAVEN)*, 915 F.2d 167, 170–71 (5th Cir. 1990) (“The Declaratory Judgment Act is remedial only . . . it is the underlying cause of action . . . that is actually litigated in a declaratory judgment action[.]”); *Braidwood Mgmt., Inc. v. Equal Emp. Opportunity Comm’n*, 70 F.4th 914, 933 (5th Cir. 2023) (explaining that in a declaratory judgment action, “it is the underlying cause of action of the defendant against the plaintiff that is actually litigated”).

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<sup>5</sup> See *supra* note 4.

Declaratory judgment is a “form[] of relief based on underlying claims.” *Johnson v. Wells Fargo Bank, NA*, 999 F.Supp.2d 919, 935 (N.D. Tex. 2014) (citing *Collin Cnty.*, 915 F.2d at 170–71). In cases like this, Petitioner need only seek declaratory judgment in his Prayer for Relief, and the Federal Respondents do not contest that if he were entitled to prevail on the merits, such relief is available to him (in light of the Declaratory Judgment Act). But the statute is not itself a cause of action; it provides “merely a form of relief that the court may grant.” *Val-Com Acquisitions Tr. v. CitiMortgage, Inc.*, 421 F. App’x 398, 401 (5th Cir. 2011). Accordingly, this “cause of action” is not actually a cause of action, and cannot supply the alleged unlawfulness for the merits of Petitioner’s habeas petition.

**E. COUNT I: MANDATORY VS. DISCRETIONARY DETENTION UNDER THE INA**

Finally, Petitioner has not been unlawfully deprived of a bond hearing. This contention must be denied because the plain text of the INA provides that he falls under the mandatory detention provisions of 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) as an alien present in the United States who has not being admitted.

**1. The Plain Text**

“As usual, we start with the statutory text.” *Restaurant Law Center v. U.S. Dep’t of Labor*, 120 F.4th 163, 177 (5th Cir. 2024). As the INA unmistakably instructs, “[a]n alien present in the United States who has not been admitted . . . shall be deemed . . . an applicant for admission.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1). The Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed this point: that aliens present in the country who have not been admitted are considered applicants for admission. *See Jennings*, 583 U.S. at 287 (quoting 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1)); *Dep’t of Homeland Sec. v. Thuraissigiam*, 591 U.S. 103, 109, 140 S.Ct. 1959, 207 L.Ed.2d 427 (2020) (same). In turn,

Section 1225 of the INA provides that “in the case of an alien who is an applicant for admission,” if that alien “is not clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to be admitted, the alien shall be detained” for removal proceedings. 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). Petitioner cannot contest that he is “an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted[.]” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1). As a straightforward statutory matter, as an alien “present in the United States who has not been admitted,” he is by definition “an applicant for admission.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1); *Sandoval v. Acuna*, No. 6:25-CV-01467, 2025 WL 3048926, at \*3 (W.D. La. Oct. 31, 2025) (“[U]nder the plain text of § 1225(a)(1), any alien physically present in the United States who has not been admitted is an ‘applicant for admission,’ regardless of how long they have been in the country or whether they intended to apply or enter properly.”). Thus, he is subject to mandatory detention. *See id.* § 1225(b)(2)(A) (instructing that “the alien *shall* be detained” in the case of “an alien seeking admission” who “is not clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to be admitted” (emphasis added)).

The only way to escape this clear text, which some courts have incorrectly endorsed, is the notion that despite being applicants for admission, such aliens are not “seeking admission.” *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1) (“[I]n the case of an alien who is an *applicant for admission*, if the examining immigration officer determines that an alien *seeking admission . . .*”). For many reasons, this reasoning is misguided.

a. The two terms are synonymous.

The text states that “in the case of an alien who is an *applicant for admission*, if the examining immigration officer determines that an alien *seeking admission . . .*” These two phrases are uttered in the same breath and nothing textual nor contextual indicates that

“seeking admission” is somehow a distinct concept. *See, e.g., Garibay-Robledo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-CV-00177, -- F.Supp.3d --, 2025 WL 3264482 (N.D. Tex. Sept. 15, 2025) (Hendrix, J.) (“Insofar as the term ‘applicant for admission’ is more passive than ‘seeking admission,’ this is inherent in the nature of agent nouns and their corresponding gerunds.”); *Olalde v. Noem*, No. 1:25-CV-00168, 2025 WL 3131942, at \*3 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 10, 2025) (rejecting this “hair-splitting parsing of the statute’s text [which] contradicts the ordinary meaning” and “makes no sense”); *Rojas v. Olson*, No. 25-CV-1437, 2025 WL 3033967, at \*8 (E.D. Wis. Oct. 30, 2025) (rejecting this purported distinction as “pack[ing] a lot of meaning into what appears to be an alternate phrasing”); *Candido v. Bondi*, No. 25-CV-867, 2025 WL 3484932 (W.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2025) (“‘[A]pplicant’ and ‘seeker’ are, indeed, accepted synonyms.” (citing multiple dictionaries)).

Even as a colloquial matter, this distinction “makes no sense.” *Olalde*, 2025 WL 3131942 at \*3. Indeed, it would be bafflingly illogical to construe a statute to begin a sentence by defining the subject (“in the case of an alien who is an applicant for admission”) only to switch to a new subject (“an alien seeking admission”) right after having defined the subject.<sup>6</sup> From an ordinary language perspective, there is no distinction.

b. The term “or otherwise” confirms the ordinary meaning.

The terms are confirmed to be linked, as the same section of the INA refers to all aliens “who are applicants for admission *or otherwise seeking admission*.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(3) (emphasis added). The “or otherwise” signifies two points. First, it highlights that the INA considers

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<sup>6</sup> If a statute read, “In the case of a fisherman, if the person fishing does not properly bait their hook . . . ,” surely one would not think that the provision discussed two distinct groups of people.

“applicants for admission” to be a *subset* of “seeking admission.” See, e.g., *Villarreal v. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.*, 839 F.3d 958, 963–64 (11th Cir. 2016) (en banc) (“or otherwise” means “the first action is a subset of the second action”). This language informs that at most, not all aliens “seeking admission” are necessarily “applicants for admission,” but all “applicants for admission” are necessarily “seeking admission.”<sup>7</sup> And as Petitioner cannot contest, he is an applicant for admission. And second, the word “or” here “introduce[s] an appositive—a word or phrase that is synonymous with what precedes it (‘Vienna or Wien,’ ‘Batman or the Caped Crusader’).” *United States v. Woods*, 571 U.S. 31, 45, 134 S.Ct. 557, 187 L.Ed.2d 472 (2013). For both these reasons, “seeking admission” cannot be a distinct concept.

- c. The notion that someone already inside the country can no longer be “seeking admission” is contradicted by the INA’s definition of “admission.”

There is perhaps some intuitive appeal to the argument that “seeking admission” is inapplicable to an alien already in the United States; as the argument might go, how could someone be seeking admission into the country if they are already in the country? But to someone well-versed in the INA, this argument crumbles upon a sincere inquiry.

The INA does not speak colloquially—certainly not in this context, as confirmed by the INA’s statutory definition of “admission” which is defined *not* as “entry” (which Petitioner needs that word to mean), but rather as “the *lawful* entry of the alien into the United States after inspection and authorization by an immigration officer.” 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(13)(A) (emphasis added). Admission, then, does not mean entry; it means *lawful* entry. *Id.* An alien

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<sup>7</sup> The everyday meaning of the statutory terms also supports this reading. One may “seek” something without “applying” for it—for example, one who is “seeking” happiness is not “applying” for it. But one applying for something is necessarily seeking it.

is an applicant for admission notwithstanding any time he has been present in the United States if that alien has never lawfully gained entry into the country; he is still “seeking admission” because he has not attained what “admission” means: “lawful entry.”<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., *Olalde*, 2025 WL 3131942, at \*3 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 10, 2025) (making this same observation when ruling for the Government); *Chen v. Almodovar*, No. 1:25-CV-8350, 2025 WL 3484855, at \*5 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2025) (same); see also *Matter of Lemus-Losa*, 25 I. & N. Dec. 734, 743 (BIA 2012) (“[M]any people who are not *actually* requesting permission to enter the United States in the ordinary sense are nevertheless deemed to be ‘seeking admission’ under the immigration laws[.]”).

d. Multiple federal appellate courts have implicitly rejected a distinction between the terms.

Albeit not addressing this precise issue, two federal appellate courts have implicitly rejected this strained effort to separate the terms, treating them as synonymous. See *Jimenez-Rodriguez v. Garland*, 996 F.3d 190, 194 n.2 (4th Cir. 2021) (“Because [Petitioner] was never lawfully admitted, he qualifies as someone ‘seeking admission[.]’”); *Succar v. Ashcroft*, 394 F.3d 8, 13 (1st Cir. 2005) (treating, based on statute, “aliens who are present in the United States, but who have not been inspected and admitted,” as “aliens who are seeking admission”).

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<sup>8</sup> This distinction should be intuitive. By way of a common analogy, a person might have physically entered a movie theater after sneaking past security, but that of course does not mean he has been admitted into the theater.

- e. Congress could have used the term “arriving alien” in Section 1225(b)(2)(A) but chose differently.

Finally, Congress used the phrase “arriving alien” at various points throughout Section 1225, but not Section 1225(b)(2)(A).<sup>9</sup> *See, e.g.*, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1225(a)(2) (b)(1), (c), (d)(2). The two terms indeed stand in direct contrast, as Section 1225(b) applies to two distinct groups of “applicants for admission”: Section (b)(1) applies to “arriving” or recently arrived aliens who must be detained pending expedited removal proceedings; and (b)(2) is a “catchall provision that applies to all applicants for admission not covered by § 1225(b)(1),” *Jennings*, 583 U.S. at 287. And in contrast to Section 1225(b)(1), Section 1225(b)(2) focuses *not* on arrival or entry but rather on *admission*. This group of aliens already in the country is precisely who the provision is geared toward, as the only other option—an “arriving” alien—falls under a different provision altogether. As put by Judge Eskridge, Section 1225(b)(2)(A) “simply cannot be said to be limited to aliens arriving at the border.” *Cabanas*, 2025 WL 3171331 at \*5.

- f. Section 1226 is the more general detention statute.

It is well-taken that Section 1226 is the more general detention statute. “A basic canon of statutory construction” is that “a specific provision applying with particularity to a matter should govern over a more general provision encompassing that same matter.” *Hughes v.*

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<sup>9</sup> This choice was deliberate; as explained by the Ninth Circuit, Congress passed IIRIRA “to replace certain aspects of the [then]-current ‘entry doctrine,’ under which illegal aliens who have entered the United States without inspection gain equities and privileges in immigration proceedings that are not available to aliens who present themselves for inspection at a port of entry.” *Torres v. Barr*, 976 F.3d 918, 928 (9th Cir. 2020) (en banc) (quoting H.R. Rep. 104-469, pt. 1, at 225). And through this shift (including in Section 1225(b)(2)(A)), IIRIRA corrected “an anomaly whereby immigrants who were attempting to lawfully enter the United States were in a worse position than persons who had crossed the border unlawfully.” *Id.*

*Canadian Nat'l Ry. Co.*, 105 F.4th 1060, 1067 (8th Cir. 2024); see *Matter of GFS Indus., L.L.C.*, 99 F.4th 223 (5th Cir. 2024) (explaining that to the extent one could read tension among two statutory provisions, the more specific provision should govern over the general). Here, Section 1226(a) is the general provision, applicable to aliens “arrested and detained pending a decision” on removal. 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a). Section 1225(b), by contrast, is much more specific, applying particularly to aliens who are “applicants for admission”—a specially defined subset of aliens that explicitly includes those “present in the United States who ha[ve] not be admitted.” *Id.* § 1225(a). Here, the specific rule for aliens who have not been admitted is that this subset of aliens must be detained. The Court should be loath to eviscerate the specific text of Section 1225(b)(2)(A) in favor of the more general text of Section 1226(a). See, e.g., *United States v. Menasche*, 348 U.S. 528, 538–39, 75 S.Ct. 513, 99 L.Ed. 615 (1955) (“It is our duty to give effect, if possible, to every clause and word of a statute, rather than to emasculate an entire section[.]”). Because Petitioner falls squarely within the definition of individuals deemed to be “applicants for admission,” the specific detention authority under § 1225(b) governs over the general authority found at § 1226(a).

## 2. The Evolution of the Text

“When the words of a statute are unambiguous,” the text of the statute is the first and last interpretive canon, and “courts must presume that a legislature says in a statute what it means and means in a statute what it says there.” *Connecticut Nat. Bank v. Germain*, 503 U.S. 249, 253–54, 112 S.Ct. 1146, 117 L.Ed.2d 391 (1992); see *Naranjo v. Uhls*, No. 4:25-CV-05756, 2025 WL 3771447, at \*2 (S.D. Tex. Dec. 31, 2025) (“[C]anons of statutory construction (like the presumption against superfluity) apply only where the text is ambiguous . . . but where, as

here [in the case of whether Section 1225(b)(2)(A) is applicable], the statutory text is unambiguous, canons of construction don't support departure from that text.").

All the same, the evolution of Section 1225(b)(2) over time confirms the Government's position, as the focus on admission was deliberate. As the BIA analyzed in-depth in *Hurtado*, and as explained by the Ninth Circuit, Congress passed IIRIRA "to replace certain aspects of the [then-]current 'entry doctrine,' under which illegal aliens who have entered the United States without inspection gain equities and privileges in immigration proceedings that are not available to aliens who present themselves for inspection at a port of entry." *Torres v. Barr*, 976 F.3d 918, 928 (9th Cir. 2020) (en banc) (quoting H.R. Rep. 104-469, pt. 1, at 225). And through this shift (including in Section 1225(b)(2)(A)), IIRIRA corrected "an anomaly whereby immigrants who were attempting to lawfully enter the United States were in a worse position than persons who had crossed the border unlawfully." *Id.* This consideration belies the necessary implication of Petitioner's argument: that because he initially snuck onto U.S. soil illegally, he is entitled to more privileges than a person who presented themselves at the border.

Moreover, despite that prior presidential administrations had taken a more permissive approach and afforded bond hearings to aliens like Petitioner, such mistake or leniency is neither here nor there when assessing the most faithful reading of the plain text. *See, e.g., Cabanas*, 2025 WL 3171331 at \*6 ("[W]hether [this position] is in line with the priorities of prior Administrations[] simply isn't the remit of an Article III court."); *Chen*, 2025 WL 3484855 at \*7 ("A failure by the Executive Branch to enforce a statutory provision, or its conclusion that the law does not apply, does not nullify a duly-enacted law."); *Ugarte-Arenas v. Olson*, No. 25-C-1721, 2025 WL 3514451, at \*4 (E.D. Wis. Dec. 8, 2025) ("The fact that previous

administrations did not seek to administer or enforce the laws Congress had enacted, however, does not change the meaning of those statutes.”).

**3. The Laken Riley Act Does Not Change This Result**

The 2025 passage of the Laken Riley Act (“LRA”), Pub. L. No. 119-1, § 2, 139 Stat. 3 (2025), required mandatory detention for a subset of illegal aliens. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c)(1)(E). The argument goes, including as advanced by Petitioner (Dkt. No. 1 at 9), the Government’s interpretation of Section 1225(b)(2)(A) here would render the LRA superfluous because that subset of aliens would have already been subject to mandator detention under the current interpretation of Section 1225(b)(2). But as considered and rejected by many courts, including the BIA in *Hurtado*, any perceived redundancy in the LRA is not a basis to ignore the unmistakable text of Section 1225(b)(2).

As the Supreme Court explained in *Barton v. Barr*, 590 U.S. 222, 239, 140 S.Ct. 1442, 206 L.Ed.2d 682 (2020), “redundancies are common in statutory drafting—sometimes in a congressional effort to be doubly sure, sometimes because of congressional inadvertence or lack of foresight, or sometimes simply because of the shortcomings of human communication.” And “[r]edundancy in one portion of a statute is not a license to rewrite or eviscerate another portion of the statute contrary to its text.” *Id.* Of particular note: while this principle is generally true, in *Barton* the Supreme Court was indeed interpreting the *very same statute*—the INA. Nothing in the LRA purported to alter or amend § 1225(b)(2)’s mandatory detention requirement. *See, e.g., Rojas v. Olson*, No. 25-CV-1437, 2025 WL 3033967 (E.D. Wis. Oct. 30, 2025) (“Indeed, nothing in the Laken Riley Act suggests any Congressional thoughts concerning the issues presented in this case.”); *Cabanas*, 2025 WL 3171331 at \*6

(recognizing that the Laken Riley Act *did* have effect when enacted, forcing the Government “to exercise the full extent of executive authority” which, at that point, it had thus far declined to do; but “[i]t doesn't follow that the Laken Riley Act undercuts the more fulsome, executive authority that Congress provided to exist independently under the text of § 1225(b)(2)(A)”; *Chen*, 2025 WL 3484855 at \*6 (noting that the LRA was a response to Congress’s “perception that the Executive Branch had failed to enforce the detention options that were *already available* to it” (emphasis added)).

#### 4. The Government’s Position Has Considerable National Support

The analysis above is compelling that aliens like Petitioner already present in the United States are applicants for admission and thus subject to mandatory detention under § 1225(b)(1). To be sure, many courts have held otherwise.<sup>10</sup> However, the Government would point firstly to the BIA’s decision in *Hurtado*, which thoughtfully and meticulously considered and rejected a myriad of counterarguments. *See* 29 I. & N. Dec. at 221–27 (discussing and rejecting no fewer than six distinct legal counterarguments). *Hurtado* is a unanimous, published decision from the BIA and binding on immigration courts. The BIA utilized its immigration expertise and gave a lengthy, comprehensive account as to why the

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<sup>10</sup> As Judge Devine noted, however, many of the courts that have ruled against the Government “appear to defer substantially to each other.” *Olalde*, 2025 WL 3131942, at \*1. what Judge Devine was getting at is the reality that many of the judges who have ruled on this issue have not actually critically looked into the issue, and instead have opted to defer to the majority. Of course, this deference then snowballs, as subsequent courts are in turn even more inclined to defer as the ratio grows more lopsided. On this point, the Federal Respondents urge the Court that “[w]hat governs this case is the text of the statute, not what other district courts have concluded.” *Id.* Judge Eskridge made a similar point in his opinion, reminding that “it remains incumbent upon district courts to each make their own, independent assessment.” *Cabanas*, 2025 WL 3171331 at \*5.

Federal Respondents' position in this case is not only correct, but comfortably so. *See, e.g., Sandoval*, 2025 WL 3048926 at \*6 (“[T]he BIA is a court that possesses subject matter expertise on immigration matters . . . when considering the BIA's thorough analysis of the plain statutory text and legislative history of the INA, this Court finds *Hurtado* persuasive.”). This Court should thus accord great weight to the persuasiveness of *Hurtado*.

Not only so, many federal courts have also sided with the Government's interpretation, and the list continues to grow. *See, e.g., Cabanas v. Bondi*, No. 4:25-CV-04830, 2025 WL 3171331 (S.D. Tex. Nov. 13, 2025) (Eskridge, J.); *Sandoval v. Acuna*, No. 6:25-CV-01467, 2025 WL 3048926 (W.D. La. Oct. 31, 2025) (Joseph, J.); *Ugarte-Arenas v. Olson*, No. 25-C-1721, 2025 WL 3514451 (E.D. Wis. Dec. 8, 2025) (Griesbach, J.); *Chen v. Almodovar*, No. 1:25-CV-08350, 2025 WL 3484855 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2025) (Vyskocil, J.); *Ramos v. Lyons*, No. 2:25-CV-09785, 2025 WL 3199872 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 12, 2025) (Wilson, J.); *Cruz v. Noem*, No. 8:25-CV-02566, 2025 WL 3482630 (C.D. Cal. Dec. 2, 2025) (Blumenfeld Jr., J.); *Valencia v. Chestnut*, -- F.Supp.3d --, 2025 WL 3205133 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 17, 2025) (Shubb, J.); *Garibay-Robledo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-CV-00177, -- F.Supp.3d --, 2025 WL 3264482 (N.D. Tex. Sept. 15, 2025) (Hendrix, J.); *Olalde v. Noem*, No. 1:25-CV-00168, 2025 WL 3131942 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 10, 2025) (Devine, J.); *Candido v. Bondi*, No. 25-CV-867, 2025 WL 3484932 (W.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2025) (Sinatra Jr., J.); *Topal v. Bondi*, No. 1:25-CV-01612, 2025 WL 3486894 (W.D. La. Dec. 3, 2025) (Doughty, J.); *Rojas v. Olson*, No. 25-CV-1437-BHL, 2025 WL 3033967 (E.D. Wis. Oct. 30, 2025) (Ludwig, J.); *Vargas Lopez v. Trump*, No. 8:25-CV-00526, 2025 WL 2780351 (D. Neb. Sept. 30, 2025) (Buescher, J.); *Chavez v. Noem*, -- F.Supp.3d --, 2025 WL 2730228 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2025)

(Bencivengo, J.).<sup>11</sup> And as earlier mentioned, multiple federal appellate courts have implicitly adopted the Government's position on this issue. See *Jiminez-Rodriguez*, 996 F.3d at 194 n.2 (“Because [Petitioner] was never lawfully admitted, he qualifies as someone ‘seeking admission[].’”); *Succar*, 394 F.3d at 13 (treating, based on statute, “aliens who are present in the United States, but who have not been inspected and admitted,” as “aliens who are seeking admission”).

The Government would urge the Court to adopt these courts' well-reasoned and textually faithful analysis.

## VI. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Federal Respondents respectfully request that the Court deny the habeas petition and enter judgment in favor of the Government.

Dated: January 8, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

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<sup>11</sup> This list of favorable authorities is not and does not purport to be exhaustive.

**CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE**

I certify that in accordance with Judge Ho's procedures, the forgoing motion includes 5,895 words, including footnotes and excluding tables, captions, and certificates..

/s/ Shawn D. Ren  
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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that on January 8, 2026, the foregoing was filed and served on counsel for Petitioner via the Court's CM/ECF service.

/s/ Shawn D. Ren  
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