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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**

ROHIT BHATTI,

Petitioner,

v.

LUIS SOTO,

**in his official capacity as Warden of
Delaney Hall Detention Facility;**

KRISTI NOEM,

**in her official capacity as Secretary, U.S.
Department of Homeland Security;**

TODD M. LYONS,

**in his official capacity as Acting Director of
Immigration & Customs Enforcement; and**

PAMELA BONDI,

**in her official capacity as Attorney General,
U.S. Department of Justice,**

Respondents.

Case No. 26-CV-203

**VERIFIED PETITION
FOR WRIT OF HABEAS
CORPUS PURSUANT TO
28 U.S.C. § 2241**

Petitioner (“Mr. Bhatti”) petitions for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241, challenging the lawfulness of his detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”). On January 8, 2026, ICE detained him without an individualized assessment that he posed a flight risk or a danger to the community and, therefore, without due process. Since then, he has remained detained without the ability to present himself at a bond

hearing. He therefore seeks immediate release from custody, or, in the alternative, the opportunity for a bond hearing.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

1. Mr. Bhatti entered the United States on or about September 3, 2024. He has not left the United States since then.
2. On January 8, 2026, ICE detained Mr. Bhatti without an individualized assessment that he posed a flight risk or a danger to the community and, therefore, without due process. Since then, he has remained detained without the ability to present himself at a bond hearing.
3. As of the date of this habeas corpus filing, upon information and belief, Mr. Bhatti is being detained at the Delaney Hall Detention Facility, in Newark, New Jersey.

PARTIES

4. Petitioner Mr. Bhatti is presently detained, upon information and belief, at Delaney Hall Detention Facility, in Newark, New Jersey.
5. Respondent Luis Soto is the warden of Delaney Hall Detention Facility, where Petitioner is presently located, and is therefore the immediate legal custodian of Mr. Bhatti. He is sued in his official capacity.
6. Respondent Kristi Noem is named in her official capacity as the Secretary of DHS. In this capacity she is responsible for the administration of the immigration laws pursuant to Section 402 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, 107 Pub. L. 296 (November 25, 2003); *see also* 8 U.S.C. § 1103(a); routinely transacts business in the District of New York; and is legally responsible for Mr. Bhatti's incarceration and removal. She is therefore a custodian of Mr. Bhatti. Respondent Noem's office is located at DHS headquarters in Washington, DC, 20528.

7. Respondent Todd M. Lyons is the Acting Director of ICE. As the head of ICE, he is responsible for decisions related to detaining and removing certain noncitizens. Director Lyons is a legal custodian of Mr. Bhatti.
8. Respondent Pamela Bondi is named in her official capacity as the Attorney General of the United States. She is responsible for the administration of the immigration laws as exercised by EOIR, pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1103(g). She routinely transacts business in the District of New Jersey, and is legally responsible for administering Mr. Bhatti's removal proceedings as well as the procedural standards used in those proceedings. She is therefore a legal custodian of Mr. Bhatti. Respondent Bondi's office is at DHS of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

9. Respondents incarcerated Mr. Bhatti on January 8, 2026, and he is under the direct control of Respondents and their agents.
10. This action arises under the Constitution of the United States, and the Immigration and Nationality Act ("INA").
11. Federal courts have subject matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 2241(c)(1) and (c)(3) (habeas corpus) to determine whether people imprisoned in federal custody are held in violation of law. *INS v. St. Cyr*, 533 U.S. 289, 305 (2001).
12. Jurisdiction is also proper pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (federal question); 5 U.S.C. § 702 (waiver of sovereign immunity); 28 U.S.C. § 1346 (original jurisdiction); Article I, § 9, cl. 2 of the U.S. Constitution (Suspension Clause); the All Writs Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1651; and 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201-2202 (Declaratory Judgement Act).

13. Further, the Court has jurisdiction to grant injunctive relief pursuant to the Declaratory Judgment Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201–02, 1651, 2241, and the All Writs Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1651. Mr. Bhatti’s detention constitutes a “severe restraint[] on his individual liberty” interest such that Mr. Bhatti is “subject to restraints not shared by the public generally” and “in custody in violation of the . . . laws . . . of the United States.” *See Hensley v. Municipal Court*, 411 U.S. 345, 351 (1973).
14. The federal district courts have jurisdiction to hear habeas corpus claims by noncitizens challenging the lawfulness of their detention by DHS. *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, 583 U.S. 281, 292–95 (2018); *Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 516–17 (2003); *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 687 (2001).
15. Venue properly lies in the District of New Jersey. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b)(2), (e). This petition is filed while Mr. Bhatti is physically present within the district, as, upon information and belief, he is incarcerated in Newark, NJ.

EXHAUSTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

16. Exhaustion is not necessary because Congress did not codify a requirement that petitioners seeking a writ of habeas corpus exhaust administrative remedies. *McCarthy v. Madigan*, 503 U.S. 140, 144 (1992) (“Where Congress specifically mandates, exhaustion is required... But where Congress has not clearly required exhaustion, sound judicial discretion governs.”) (citation omitted).
17. Further, exhaustion of remedies is unnecessary if futile. *See Beharry v. Ashcroft*, 329 F.3d 51, 62 (2d Cir. 2003) (Sotomayor, J.) (as amended) (judicial exhaustion may be excused when “available remedies provide no genuine opportunity for adequate relief” or exhaustion “would be futile”). Here, exhaustion would be futile because the Board

of Immigration Appeals, in the precedential decision of *Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, 29 I&N Dec. 216 (BIA 2025) (“*Hurtado*”), held that individuals deemed inadmissible for being present in the United States without having been admitted or paroled (e.g., those who crossed the border without inspection) are subject to mandatory detention without the opportunity for a bond hearing.

18. Finally, even if meaningful administrative remedies were promptly available, Mr. Bhatti, as a noncitizen challenging the lawfulness of his ongoing immigration detention, is not required to exhaust those remedies under 8 U.S.C. § 2241. *See Louisaire v. Muller*, 758 F. Supp. 2d 229, 234 (S.D.N.Y. 2010).

ARGUMENT

COUNT ONE

FIFTH AMENDMENT – DUE PROCESS

DENIAL OF OPPORTUNITY TO CHALLENGE CONTINUED DETENTION

1. Petitioner repeats and incorporates by reference each and every allegation contained in the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.
2. The Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that “[n]o person shall . . . be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” U.S. Const. amend. V.
3. Procedural due process requires that the government be constrained before it acts in a way that deprives individuals of liberty interests protected under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.
4. Mr. Bhatti is indisputably entitled to the protections of the Due Process Clause. *See Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 693 (2001) (“[T]he Due Process Clause applies to all ‘persons’ within the United States, including aliens, whether their presence here is

lawful, unlawful, temporary, or permanent.”). Mr. Bhatti has lived in the United States continuously since September 2024.

5. Respondents have deprived Mr. Bhatti of his liberty interest protected by the Fifth Amendment by detaining him since January 8, 2026, without any hearing to determine whether his ongoing detention is justified.
6. To the extent that Respondents claim that Mr. Bhatti is precluded from challenging his detention because of how he entered the United States, DHS’s interpretation of the law is incorrect. A vast number of federal district courts, including all that have considered the issue in the District of New Jersey, have rejected the rationale of *Hurtado* and have instead ruled that non-citizens present in the United States charged as being present without admission or parole are detained under § 1226(a) and therefore have the right to a bond hearing. *See Patel v. Almodovar*, No. 25-cv-15345-SDW, ECF 21 (D.N.J. Oct. 28, 2025) (rejecting argument that petitioner charged as being present without admission or parole is detained under § 1225(b)(2), and instead finding detention under § 1226(a)); *Betancourt Soto v. Soto*, --- F. Supp. 3d ---, 2025 WL 2976572 (D.N.J. Oct. 22, 2025) (same); *Mugliza Castillo v. Lyons*, No. 25-16219 (MEF), ECF 11 (D.N.J. Oct. 10, 2025) (same); *Zumba v. Bondi*, No. 25-14626 (KSH), 2025 WL 2753496, at *7–9 (D.N.J. Sept. 26, 2025) (holding noncitizen residing in the United States was not affirmatively “seeking admission” and therefore not subject to § 1225(b)(2)).
7. Respondents’ actions in detaining Mr. Bhatti without any procedure to contest his ongoing unlawful detention violates the Fifth Amendment.

COUNT TWO
FIFTH AMENDMENT – SUBSTANTIVE DUE PROCESS

8. Petitioner repeats and incorporates by reference each and every allegation contained

in the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

9. Petitioners' continued detention of Mr. Bhatti violates his right to substantive due process protected by the Fifth Amendment.
10. "Freedom from imprisonment—from government custody, detention, or other forms of physical restraint—lies at the heart of the liberty that [the Due Process] Clause protects." *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 690. Any deprivation of this fundamental liberty interest must be accompanied not only by adequate procedural protections, but also by a "sufficiently strong special justification" to outweigh the significant deprivation of liberty. *Id.*
11. Mr. Bhatti should not be detained. He is neither a flight risk, nor a risk to public safety or national security. Accordingly, Respondents cannot show any valid justification—let alone a "sufficiently strong special justification"—for depriving Mr. Bhatti of his fundamental rights.
12. For all of the foregoing reasons, Mr. Bhatti' continued detention is in violation of his substantive due process rights.

COUNT THREE
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE ACT

13. Petitioner repeats and incorporates by reference each and every allegation contained in the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.
14. The Administrative Procedure Act ("APA") provides a right to sue when an individual has been "aggrieved" by a "final agency action for which there is no other adequate remedy in court." 5 U.S.C. § 704.
15. Respondents' actions in detaining and seeking to remove Mr. Bhatti were arbitrary,

capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law; contrary to constitutional right, power, privilege, or immunity; in excess of statutory jurisdiction, authority, or limitations, or short of statutory right; and without observance of procedure required by law, in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A)-(D).

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Mr. Bhatti prays that this Court grant the following relief:

- 1) Assume jurisdiction over this matter;
- 2) Enjoin Respondents from transferring Mr. Bhatti outside of the jurisdiction of the District of New Jersey pending the resolution of this case;
- 3) **Issue a writ of habeas corpus directing Respondents to provide his immediate release from custody**, see *Guaman Lliguicota v. Cabezas*, No. CV 25-17216 (JKS), 2025 WL 3496300, at *2 (D.N.J. Dec. 5, 2025) (ordering immediate release as remedy to habeas); *Contreras Maldonado v. Cabezas*, No. 25-13004 (JKS), 2025 WL 2985256, at *7 (D.N.J. Oct. 23, 2025) (same); *Bethancourt Soto v. Soto*, No. 25- 16200 (CPO), --- F. Supp. 3d ---, 2025 WL 2976572, at *9 (D.N.J. Oct. 22, 2025)(same); *Zumba v. Bondi*, No. 25-14626 (KSH), 2025 WL 2753496, at *11 (D.N.J. Sept. 26, 2025) (same).
- 4) Award Mr. Bhatti attorney's fees and costs under the Equal Access to Justice Act ("EAJA") as amended, 5 U.S.C. § 504 and 28 U.S.C. § 2412, and on any other basis justified under law; and
- 5) Grant any other and further relief that this Court deems just and proper.

Dated: January 11, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

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Attorney for Petitioner

VERIFICATION

I, /s/ Michael Z. Goldman, hereby declare under penalty of perjury pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746 that, on information and belief, the factual statements in the foregoing Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus are true and correct.

Dated: January 11, 2026

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Michael Z. Goldman, certify that on January 11, 2026, I electronically filed the attached the foregoing Petition for Habeas Corpus with the Clerk of the Court for the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey using the CM/ECF system. Service will therefore be effected by the CM/ECF system.

/s/ Michael Goldman

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