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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
**SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

ESTEBAN RIVERO,

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.: 26-cv-00148-BJC-JLB

**Amended[2] Petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus**

[1] Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc., is filing the instant petition with provisional appointment under Chief Judge Order No. 134.

[2] Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 15(a)(1)(A) permits a party to "amend its pleading once as a matter of course no later than 21 days after serving it." Fed. R. Civ. Pro. 15(a)(1)(A) (punctuation altered). Petitioner therefore files this amended petition as of right. This version indicates amended potions through redlining.

## INTRODUCTION

This civil immigration habeas petition seeks to prevent Esteban Rivero's indefinite detention pending deportation absent the basic regulatory and due process guarantees of 8 C.F.R. §§ 241.4(l), 241.13(i), and *United States ex rel. Accardi v. Shaughnessy*, 347 U.S. 260, 268 (1954). Second, it seeks to prevent his indefinite detention pending deportation to Cuba absent the basic statutory and due process guarantees outlined in *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678 (2001). It also seeks to prevent his deportation to a third country without him first receiving basic due process guarantees of notice and opportunity to be heard as to his statutory rights to seek withholding of removal and Convention Against Torture relief.

Mr. Rivero came to the United States in 1995 from Cuba. In 2010, Mr. Rivero was ordered removed but the immigration judge granted him relief from removal to Cuba under the Convention Against Torture. So ICE released him after about 76 days of detention. In the 15 years since, Mr. Rivero has never missed a check-in and has always complied with the conditions of his supervision.

Despite Mr. Rivero's long history of compliance, ICE re-arrested him on November 1, 2025. ICE did not provide any written or oral information about why Mr. Rivero was being re-detained or any chance to contest his redetention.

The government also cannot remove Mr. Rivero in the reasonably foreseeable future. ICE cannot remove Mr. Rivero to Cuba because of the CAT relief. On January 8, 2026, ICE was informed that the Mexican government denied accepting Mr. Rivero. ICE has not identified a third country.

Courts in this district and around the country have ordered Cubans released from ICE custody for the same reasons. *See Rios v. Noem*, No. 25-CV-2866-JES, Doc. 15 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 10, 2025); *Rodriguez-Gutierrez v. Noem*, 25-cv-02726-BAS-SBC, Doc. 14 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 7, 2025); *Izquierdo-Matos v. Noem*, Doc. 12,

25-cv-02979-BJC-BLM (S.D. Cal. Nov. 18, 2025); *Arostegui-Campo v. Noem*, 25-cv-03064-JLS-MMP, Doc. 11 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 25. 2025). One court underlined, "Rules matter. Hearings matter. In recognition of this cornerstone principle of our jurisprudence, a growing chorus of district courts have found that—in similar cases—the government's unlawful detention . . . . warrants immediate release." *Delkash v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-1675-HDV-AGR, 2025 WL 2683988 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 28, 2025).

On January 8, 2026, ICE attempted to remove Mr. Rivero to Mexico but "the Mexican government denied" accepting him. Doc. 5-1 at ¶ 11. The government has not identified another third country for removal. Id. at ¶ 12.

## STATEMENT OF FACTS

### I. Mr. Rivero lived under supervision for 15 years and then was re-detained without an individualized reason for detention and without an opportunity to contest his re-detention.

Mr. Rivero was born in Cuba in 1961. He came to the United States as a political refugee in 1995. Exhibit A, Declaration of Petitioner, at ¶ 1.

On December 8, 2010, he was ordered deported to Cuba.[3] It was his understanding that the judge granted him relief from removal to Cuba under the Convention Against Torture. *Id.* at ¶ 2. Because ICE was unable to remove him, Mr. Rivero was placed on an order of supervision in 2011. Exh. A at ¶ 3. While on release, Mr. Rivero consistently checked in to ICE offices. *Id.* at ¶ 3. He complied with all his conditions and did not even have a traffic ticket. *Id.* at ¶ 3.

On November 1, 2025, Mr. Rivero reported to his annual check-in with ICE in Miramar, Florida. *Id.* at ¶ 4. The ICE agents did not tell him why he was being detained. *Id.* Nor did ICE give him an opportunity to contest his re-detention. *Id.* at ¶ 4-5. ICE only said that he was no longer under an order of supervision and

[3] https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/en/caseInformation

that the process had now changed. *Id.* at ¶ 4. Mr. Rivero was sent him to multiple detention centers in Florida, including the one called Alcatraz, and then to Texas, and he is now at the Otay Detention Center in San Diego. *Id.*

## II. 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 Cuban immigrants—ICE has begun trying to deport those individuals to third countries without adequate notice or a hearing. The Trump administration reportedly has negotiated with at least 58 countries to accept deportees from other nations. Edward Wong et al, *Inside the Global Deal-Making Behind Trump's Mass Deportations*, N.Y. Times, June 25, 2025. On June 25, 2025, the New York Times reported that seven countries—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Kosovo, Mexico, Panama, and Rwanda—had agreed to accept deportees who are not their own citizens. *Id.* ICE has carried out highly publicized third country deportations to South Sudan and Eswatini.

The Administration has reportedly negotiated with countries to have many of these deportees imprisoned in prisons, camps, or other facilities. The government paid El Salvador about $5 million to imprison more than 200 deported Venezuelans in a maximum-security prison notorious for gross human rights abuses, known as CECOT. *See id.* In February, Panama and Costa Rica took in hundreds of deportees from countries in Africa and Central Asia and imprisoned them in hotels, a jungle camp, and a detention center. *Id.*; Vanessa Buschschluter, *Costa Rican court orders release of migrants deported from U.S.*, BBC (Jun. 25, 2025). On July 4, 2025, ICE deported eight men to South Sudan. *See* Wong, *supra*. On July 15, ICE deported five men to the tiny African nation of Eswatini where they are reportedly being held in solitary confinement. Gerald Imray, *3 Deported by US held in African Prison Despite Completing Sentences, Lawyers Say*, PBS (Sept. 2, 2025). Many of these countries are known for human

rights abuses or instability. For instance, conditions in South Sudan are so extreme that the U.S. State Department website warns Americans not to travel there, and if they do, to prepare their will, make funeral arrangements, and appoint a hostage-taker negotiator first. *See* Wong, *supra*.

On June 23 and July 3, 2025, the Supreme Court issued a stay of a national class-wide preliminary injunction issued in *D.V.D. v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, No. CV 25-10676-BEM, 2025 WL 1142968, at *1, 3 (D. Mass. Apr. 18, 2025), which required ICE to follow statutory and constitutional requirements before removing an individual to a third country. *U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. v. D.V.D.*, 145 S. Ct. 2153 (2025) (mem.); *id.*, No. 24A1153, 2025 WL 1832186 (U.S. July 3, 2025).[4] 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. Exh. B ("Third Country Removal Policy").

Under the 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'

[4] Though the Supreme Court's order was unreasoned, the dissent noted that the government had sought a stay based on procedural arguments applicable only to class actions. *Dep't of Homeland Sec. v. D.V.D.*, 145 S. Ct. 2153, 2160 (2025) (Sotomayor, J., dissenting). Thus, "even if the Government [was] correct that classwide relief was impermissible" in *D.V.D.*, Respondents still "remain[] obligated to comply with orders enjoining [their] conduct with respect to individual plaintiffs" like Mr. Mora Gutierrez. *Id.* In short, the Supreme Court's decision does not override this Court's authority to grant individual injunctive relief. *See Nguyen v. Scott*, No. 2:25-CV-01398, 2025 WL 2419288, at *20–23 (W.D. Wash. Aug. 21, 2025).

notice. But "[i]n exigent circumstances," a removal may take place in as little as six hours, "as long as the alien is provided reasonably means and opportunity to speak with an attorney prior to the removal." *Id.*

Upon serving notice, ICE "will not affirmatively ask whether the alien is afraid of being removed to the country of removal." *Id.* (emphasis original). If the noncitizen "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, [ICE] may proceed with removal to the country identified on the notice." *Id.* at 2. If the noncitizen "does affirmatively state a fear if removed to the country of removal" then ICE will refer the case to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ("USCIS") for a screening for eligibility for withholding of removal and protection under the Convention Against Torture ("CAT"). *Id.* at 2. "USCIS will generally screen within 24 hours." *Id.* If USCIS determines that the noncitizen does not meet the standard, the individual will be removed. *Id.* If USCIS determines that the noncitizen has met the standard, then the policy directs ICE to either move to reopen removal proceedings "for the sole purpose of determining eligibility for [withholding of removal protection] and CAT" or designate another country for removal. *Id.*

## CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

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

First, it should order Mr. Rivero 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. Rivero, 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. Rivero to a third country without first providing notice and a sufficient opportunity to be heard before an immigration judge.

## I. Count 1: ICE failed to comply with its own regulations before re-detaining Mr. Rivero, violating his rights under applicable regulations and the Fifth Amendment.

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 re-detention generally. 8 C.F.R. § 241.13(i) applies to persons released after providing good reason to believe that they will not be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future, as Mr. Rivero was. *See Rokhfirooz*, No. 25-CV-2053-RSH-VET, 2025 WL 2646165 at *2 (order from Judge Huie explaining this regulatory framework and granting a habeas petition for ICE's failure to follow these regulations).

These regulations permit an official to "return [the person] to custody" because they "violate[d] any of the conditions of release." 8 C.F.R. § 241.13(i)(1); *see also* § 241.4(*l*)(1).

Otherwise, they contain four major regulatory protections for people like Mr. Rivero, who did not violate any condition of release. They permit revocation of release only if the appropriate official (1) "determines that there is a significant likelihood that the alien may be removed in the reasonably foreseeable future," § 241.13(i)(2), and (2) makes that finding "on account of changed circumstances." *Id.* No matter the reason for re-detention, (3) the re-detained person is entitled to "an initial informal interview promptly," during which they "will be notified of the reasons for revocation." §§ 241.4(*l*)(1); 241.13(i)(3). The interviewer must (4) "afford[] the [person] an opportunity to respond to the reasons for revocation," allowing them to "submit any evidence or information" relevant to re-detention and evaluating "any contested facts." *Id.*

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).

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

First, Mr. Rivero did not receive notice of the reasons for his re-detention upon revocation. It is too late now to comply with that requisite.

Second, Mr. Rivero did not receive an informal interview permitting him to contest his redetention. Any interview conducted now would not be prompt, as required by the regulation. *See, e.g.*, *M.S.L. v. Bostock*, Civ. No. 6:25-cv-01204-AA, 2025 WL 2430267, at *11 (D. Or. Aug. 21, 2025) (27-day delay not prompt); *Yang v. Kaiser*, No. 2:25-cv-02205-DAD-AC (HC), 2025 WL 2791778, at *5 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 20, 2025) (two-month delay not prompt); *Soryadvongsa v. Noem*, 24-cv-2663-AGS-DDL, 2025 WL 3126821, at *1 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 8, 2025) (29-day delay not prompt).

Third, ICE did not revoke Mr. Rivero's release for a permissible reason. He was not returned to custody because of a conditions violation. And there are no changed circumstances that justify re-detaining him.

Absent any evidence for "why obtaining a travel document is more likely this time around[,] Respondents' intent to eventually complete a travel document request for Petitioner does not constitute a changed circumstance." *Hoac v. Becerra*, No. 2:25-CV-01740-DC-JDP, 2025 WL 1993771, at *4 (E.D. Cal. July 16, 2025) (citing *Liu v. Carter*, No. 25-3036-JWL, 2025 WL 1696526, at *2 (D. Kan. June 17, 2025)). Furthermore, past experience teaches that ICE almost

certainly made no changed-circumstances determination before his arrest. *See Rokhfirooz*, 2025 WL 2646165 at *3.

Numerous courts have released re-detained immigrants after finding that ICE failed to comply with applicable regulations. *See, e.g.*, *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. Rivero] is entitled to his release (subject to the same Order of Supervision that governed his most recent release)." *Liu*, 2025 WL 1696526, at *3.

## II. Claim 2: Petitioner's detention violates Zadvydas and 8 U.S.C. § 1231.

In *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678 (2001), the Supreme Court considered a problem affecting people like Petitioner: 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.*

Petitioner can make all the threshold showings needed to shift the burden to the government.

**A. The six-month grace period expired in June 2011.**

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). Indeed, the statute defining the beginning of the removal period is linked to the latest of three dates, all of which relevant here are tied to when the removal order

is issued. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(B).[5]

Here, the immigration ordered removal and granted deferral under C.A.T. of removal to Cuba on **December 10, 2010.**[6] Accordingly, their 90-day removal period began then, ending on **March 10, 2011**. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(1)(B). The *Zadvydas* grace period expired three months after that removal period on **June 10, 2011**. *See, e.g.*, *Tadros v. Noem*, 2025 WL 1678501, No. 25-cv-4108(EP), *2–*3. *Zadvydas* established this six-month grace period to give ICE a fair chance to effectuate the removal before a court gets involved. 533 U.S. at 700–01. That was why the Court chose to expand the grace period beyond the 90-day statutory removal period: because Congress likely did not "believe[] that all reasonably foreseeable removals could be accomplished in that time." *Id.* at 701.

Because the six-month grace period has passed, this Court must evaluate Petitioner's *Zadvydas* claim using the burden-shifting framework. At the first stage of the framework, Petitioner must "provide[] good reason to believe that there is no significant likelihood of removal in the 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

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[5] Those dates are, specifically, (1) "[t]he date the order of removal becomes administratively final;" (2) "[i]f the removal order is judicially reviewed and if a court orders a stay of the removal of the alien, the date of the court's final order;" or (3) "[i]f the alien is detained or confined (except under an immigration process), the date the alien is released from detention or confinement." *Id.*

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

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 whether Petitioner will likely be removed: Continued detention is permissible only if it is "significant[ly] like[ly]" that ICE will be able to remove them. *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 when Petitioner 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 Petitioner "would *eventually* receive" a travel document, they can still meet this burden by giving good reason to anticipate sufficiently lengthy delays. *Younes v. Lynch*, 2016 WL 6679830, at *2 (E.D. Mich. Nov. 14, 2016).

Petitioner satisfies this standard.

*First*, Petitioner cannot be removed to Cuba. An immigration judge found that it is more-likely-than-not that they would risk being tortured if removed to that country.

*Second*, ICE attempted to remove Petitioner to Mexico but Mexico has already indicated that they do not accept him for removal.

*Third*, Respondents had 15 years to find a third country for removal and have not ben able to find one.

*Finally*, ICE states it is searching for an alternative third country but has yet to name any country. Even if a third country is later identified, the government must first provide Petitioner with notice and an opportunity to apply for protection as to *that* country as well, if appropriate. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(b)(3). *See also Andriasian v. INS*, 180 F.3d 1033, 1041 (9th Cir. 1999); *Kossov v. INS*, 132 F.3d 405, 408-09 (7th Cir. 1998); *El Himri v. Ashcroft*, 378 F.3d 932, 938 (9th Cir. 2004); *cf Protsenko v. U.S. Att'y Gen.*, 149 F. App'x 947, 953 (11th Cir. 2005 (per curiam) (permitting removal to third country only where individuals received "ample notice and an opportunity to be heard.")

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

**~~II.~~III. Count ~~23~~: ICE may not remove Mr. Rivero 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. Though the government will not be able to prove that there is a significant prospect of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future, an

unanticipated change of circumstances could open up a heretofore unavailable avenue to third-country removal. If that happens, ICE could remove Mr. Rivero with as little as 24 hours' notice or no notice at all. This Court should enter an order prohibiting such surprise removals, as they violate the Due Process Clause.

**A. Legal background**

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

The policies in the June 6, 2025 memo do not adhere to these requirements. 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. Rivero without these due process safeguards.

**~~III.~~IV. 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. Rivero hereby requests such a hearing on any material, disputed facts.

**~~IV.~~V. Prayer for relief**

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

1. Order Respondents to immediately release Petitioner from custody under the same conditions of supervision;
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 a third country, 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: ~~January 11, 2026~~January 22, 2026

*s/ Zandra L. Lopez*

Zandra L. Lopez
Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc.
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**PROOF OF SERVICE**

I, the undersigned, will cause the attached petition for a writ of habeas corpus to be emailed to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California at USACAS.Habeas2241@usdoj.gov when I receive the court-stamped copy.

Dated: ~~January 11, 2026~~January 22, 2026

*s/ Zandra L. Lopez*

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