

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
FORT MYERS DIVISION

DANIEL CASTILLO CEPERO,

Petitioner,

v.

Case No. 2:26-cv-53-KCD-DNF

DAVID HARDIN, et al. (all official
capacity),

Respondents.

Response to Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus

Petitioner Daniel Castillo Cepero challenges his detention by U.S. Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”), arguing he is entitled to a bond hearing under 8 U.S.C. § 1226. This is a standard § 1225 v. § 1226 case.

While reserving all rights—including a right to appeal—the Federal Respondents submit this abbreviated brief in lieu of exhaustive, duplicative briefing on the § 1225(b)(2) v. § 1226 issue. This is an effort to preserve Respondents’ arguments and conserve scarce judicial resources. Should the Court prefer a fulsome discussion or entertain reconsidering its rulings on § 1226, Respondents request leave to submit additional briefing. Otherwise, these standard preservation arguments are included below in Section C.

Background

Castillo Cepero is a citizen and national of Cuba who entered the United States without permission in 2022. *See* Form I-213, Record of Deportable/Inadmissible Alien, attached as Exhibit A. He was briefly detained following his encounter at the border but released with the issuance of a Notice to Appear placing him in removal proceedings. *Id.*

Certified Habeas Return

ICE is detaining Castillo Cepero under the mandatory detention provisions of 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2). *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2243 (“The person to whom the writ or order is directed shall make a return certifying the true cause of the detention.”). Castillo Cepero bears the burden to prove his custody violates federal law. *Whitfield v. U.S. Sec’y of State*, 853 F. App’x 327, 329 (11th Cir. 2021).

Discussion

A. Detention at Border

Petitioner was first detained at the border when he illegally entered the United States. Given his detention at or near the border upon entry, § 1225(b)(2) applies to Munoz. The Court consistently explains this reasoning. *Alfonso Parra v. DHS*, No. 2:25-cv-1116-KCD-DNF, 2026 WL 21243, at *2 (M.D. Fla. Jan. 5, 2026); *Aranda Garcia*, 2025 WL 3537592, at *1; *Duenas Garcia*, 2025 WL 3277163, at *2; *Pirto v. Warden*, No. 2:25-cv-966-KCD-DNF, Doc. 13 (M.D. Fla. Nov. 13, 2025). Likewise, the Court should deny the Petition.

B. Standard § 1225 v. § 1226 Argument

In *In re Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, 29 I&N Dec. 216 (B.I.A. 2025), the Board of Immigration Appeals (“BIA”) examined the plain language of § 1225, the Immigration and Nationality Act’s (“INA”) statutory scheme, Supreme Court and BIA precedent, the legislative history of the INA and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, and ICE’s prior practices. After doing so, the BIA held that “under a plain language reading of section 235(b)(2)(A) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A), immigration judges lack authority to hear bond requests or to grant bond to aliens, like the respondent, who are present in the United States without admission.” 29 I&N Dec. at 225. This Court should rule the same.

Respondents acknowledge that questions of law in this case substantially overlap with *Patel v. Hardin*, No. 2:25-cv-870-JES-NPM, 2025 WL 3442706 (M.D. Fla. Dec. 1, 2025). Courts have struggled with the interpretive question of applying § 1225(b)(2) or § 1226(a) in these instances. Even courts disagreeing with Respondents note this “statutory-interpretation issue is difficult and close.” *Ahmed v. Bondi*, No. 25-cv-4711 (ECT/SGE), 2026 WL 25627, at *1 (D. Minn. Jan. 5, 2026).

It should be noted, however, growing numbers of courts recently ruled in Respondents’ favor on this issue. *Iraheta Morales v. Noem*, No. 25-62598-CIV-SINGHAL, 2026 WL 236307, at *3-9 (S.D. Fla. Jan. 29, 2029); *Diaz Lopez v. ICE*,

No. 3:25-cv-1313-JEP-SJH (M.D. Fla. Jan. 26, 2026).¹ Some decisions have even started recognizing that there is no jurisdiction over this question to begin with:

For this reason, the Court finds that Congress has not conferred jurisdiction on federal district courts to interpret or apply Section 1225 or Section 1226 of the INA. Divesting federal district courts of jurisdiction over such determinations makes sense. After all, Congress

¹ *E.g.*, *Perez Ramirez v. Holt*, No. 2:25-cv-00156-SCM, 2026 WL 226964, at *2-7 (E.D. Ky. Jan. 28, 2026); *Vidal Alvacora v. Olson*, No. 0:26-cv-00675-DMT-SGE, 2026 WL 220417, at *1-3 (D. Minn. Jan. 28, 2026); *Qiwei Weng v. Genalo*, No. 25 Civ. 09595 (JHR), 2026 WL 194248, at *3-6 (S.D.N.Y. Jan. 25, 2026); *Hernandez v. Olson*, No. 25-cv-1670-bhl, 2026 WL 161509, at *3-7 (E.D. Wis. Jan. 21, 2026); *Singh v. Albarran*, No. 1:26-cv-00244-WBS-CSK, 2026 WL 124881, at *1-2 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 16, 2026); *J.E.P.M. v. Wofford*, No. 1:26-cv-00316-WBS-CKD, 2026 WL 125270, at *1 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 16, 2026); *Martinez v. Villegas*, No. 1:25-CV-256-H, 2026 WL 114418, at *3-8 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 15, 2026); *Sargsyan v. Bondi*, No. 1:26-cv-00259-WBS-CKD, 2026 WL 114665, at *1-2 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 15, 2026); *Cutiopala v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-00211-MAL, 2026 WL 113567, at *2-5 (E.D. Mo. Jan. 15, 2026); *Chen v. Almodovar*, No. 25 Civ. 9670 (JPC), 2026 WL 100761, at *7-14 (S.D.N.Y. Jan. 14, 2026); *Choudhary v. Albarran*, No. 1:26-cv-00119-WBS-CKD, 2026 WL 102708, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 14, 2026); *Singh v. Noem*, No. 1:26-cv-00224 WBS CSK, 2026 WL 91787, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 13, 2026); *Singh v. Noem*, No. 2:25-cv-00157-SCM, 2026 WL 74558, at *3-7 (E.D. Ky. Jan. 9, 2026); *Garibay-Robledo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-00177-H, 2026 WL 81679, at *3-9 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 9, 2026); *Rodriguez v. Olson*, No. 1:25-cv-12961, 2026 WL 63613, at *5-8 (N.D. Ill. Jan. 8, 2026); *Gutierrez Sosa v. Holt*, No. CIV-25-1257-PRW, 2026 WL 36344, at *3-5 (W.D. Okla. Jan. 6, 2026); *Gomez Hernandez v. Lyons*, No. 1:25-CV-216-H, 2026 WL 31775, at *2-8 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 6, 2026); *Ugarte-Arenas v. Olson*, No. 25-C-1721, 2025 WL 3514451, at *1-4 (E.D. Wis. Dec. 8, 2025); *Suarez v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-00202-JMD, 2025 WL 3312168, at *2-3 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 28, 2025); *Manzo Valencia v. Chestnut*, No. 1:25-cv-01550 WBS JDP, 2025 WL 3205133, at *1-4 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 17, 2025); *Cortes Alonzo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-01519 WBS SCR, 2025 WL 3208284, at *1-5 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 17, 2025); *Altamirano Ramos v. Lyons*, No. 2:25-cv-09785-SVW-AJR, 2025 WL 3199872, at *4-9 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 12, 2025); *Montoya Cabanas v. Bondi*, No. 4:25-cv-04830, 2025 WL 3171331, at *3-7 (S.D. Tex. Nov. 13, 2025); *Olalde v. Noem*, No. 1:25-CV-00168-JMD, 2025 WL 3131942, at *2-5 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 10, 2025); *Oliveira v. Patterson*, No. 6:25-cv-01463-DCJ-DJA, 2025 WL 3095972, at *2-6 (W.D. La. Nov. 4, 2025); *Sandoval v. Acuna*, No. 6:25-cv-01467, 2025 WL 3048926, *2-6 (W.D. La. Oct. 31, 2025); *Rojas v. Olson*, No. 25-cv-1437-bhl, 2025 WL 3033967, at *2-10 (E.D. Wis. Oct. 30, 2025); *Kum v. Ross*, No. 6:25-cv-00451-DCJ-CBW, 2025 WL 3113646, at *1-2 (W.D. La. Oct. 22, 2025); *Vargas v. Lopez*, No. 25-CV-526, 2025 WL 2780351, at *4-9 (D. Neb. Sept. 30, 2025); *Chavez v. Noem*, No. 25-CV-23250-CAB-SBC, 2025 WL 2730228 at *4-5 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2025); *Pipa-Aquise v. Bondi*, No. 1:25-cv-01094-MSN-WBP, 2025 WL 2490657, at *1-2 (E.D. Va. Aug. 5, 2025).

created an administrative process intended to act quickly (though in practice its actions have been anything but) in a field requiring specialized knowledge generally outside the experience of the inferior federal courts.

Castillo Cepero Nataren v. Raycraft, No. 4:26-cv-212, 2026 WL 214368, at *2 (N.D. Ohio Jan. 28, 2026); *Amaya-Velis v. Raycraft*, No. 4:26-cv-73, 2026 WL 100596, at *2-3 (N.D. Ohio Jan. 14, 2026).

As the battle of the string cites builds, there is clearly a countrywide district split on applying § 1225 or § 1226 in these instances. And at least five circuits—including the Eleventh—have active appeals on the matter. *Martinez v. Hyde*, No. 25-1902 (1st Cir.); *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, No. 25-20496 (5th Cir.); *Pizzaro Reyes v. ERO*, No. 25-1982 (6th Cir.); *Cortes Alonzo v. Noem*, No. 25-7348 (9th Cir.); *Hernandez Alvarez v. Warden*, No. 25-14065 (11th Cir.).² Soon, there will be appellate clarity one way or the other on this question. Until that time, courts nationwide will continue struggling with this interpretive issue.

Respondents respectfully disagree with the Court's decision in *Patel* and believe appeals on this legal question will be in their favor. That said, in the interest of judicial economy and to expedite the Court's consideration of this matter, Respondents make the following arguments for preservation purposes:

² *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, No. H-25-3726, 2025 WL 2886346 (S.D. Tex. Oct. 7, 2025); *Martinez v. Hyde*, 792 F. Supp. 3d 211 (D. Mass. 2025); *Cortes Alonzo*, 2025 WL 3208284; *Pizzaro Reyes v. ERO*, No. 25-cv-12546, 2025 WL 2609425 (E.D. Mich. Sept. 9, 2025) *Alvarez v. Morris*, No. 0:25-cv-24806, Doc. 6 (S.D. Fla. Oct. 27, 2024).

1. 8 U.S.C. § 1252(g) bars review of the Castillo Cepero's claims. *Patel*, No. 2:25-cv-870-JES-NPM (Doc. 15 at 4-7) (M.D. Fla.).³
2. 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9) bars review of these claims. *Id.* at 7-8.
3. Castillo Cepero failed to exhaust administrative remedies. *Id.* at 8-9.
4. Castillo Cepero is properly detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1225. *Id.* at 10-16.

Should the Court determine Castillo Cepero's detention is subject to § 1226, the only appropriate remedy is to begin the process for a bond hearing—not outright release—during which an IJ can determine whether Castillo Cepero is a flight risk or danger to the community. *See, e.g., Vasquez Carcamo*, 2025 WL 3119263, at *5-6. Again, only EOIR can provide a bond hearing. That said, if ordered, ICE would do what is in its power to facilitate a hearing. *See Mirando Bravo*, No. 2:25-cv-1046, Doc. 8 at *3.

Conclusion

Castillo Cepero's Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus should be denied. Even if the Court grants relief under § 1226, the only appropriate relief would be a bond determination by ICE and submission to an actual IJ bond hearing as set by EOIR.

Date: February 6, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

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³ Respondents acknowledge Local Rule 3.01(h) prohibits incorporation by reference of any other motion, legal memorandum, or brief. To achieve the purpose of efficiency, Respondents respectfully request the Court to suspend application of the rule in this instance. *See* M.D. Fla. Local R. 1.01(a)-(b); Fed. R. Civ. P. 1.

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