

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
SAN ANTONIO DIVISION

Oniervys Morell Cruz,

Petitioner, by Next Friend, Iliana Viera
Alonso

v.

ICE, *et. al.*
Respondents.

Case No. 5:26-CV-0057-FB

RESPONSE TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS

Federal Respondents provide the following response to Petitioner's *pro se* habeas petition.¹ Any allegations that are not specifically admitted herein are denied. Petitioner is not entitled to the relief sought. Petitioner is subject to mandatory detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2). *Buenrostro v. Bondi*, No. 25-20496, ---- F.4th ---- 2026 WL 323330, at *1 (5th Cir. Feb. 6, 2026). The *Buenrostro* decision is binding precedent and requires that the Court deny this habeas petition as it relates to the statutory authority to detain Petitioner during removal proceedings.² For the reasons that follow, Respondents urge this Court to also find that Petitioner has not shown that this mandatory detention provision is unconstitutional as applied to him. The petition should be denied in its entirety without a hearing.

¹ The Department of Justice represents only federal employees in this action.

² The *Buenrostro* decision is a published decision and precedential authority even though the mandate has yet to issue. *See, e.g., Martin v. Singletary*, 965 F.2d 944, 945 n.1 (11th Cir. 1992) (explaining that even a stay in the issuance of a mandate does not impact the precedential value of published opinions); *Acute Care Ambul. Serv., L.L.C. v. Azar II*, No. 7:20-CV-00217, 2020 WL 7640206, at *13 (S.D. Tex. Dec. 3, 2020) (rejecting the argument that a Fifth Circuit decision is not controlling because “the mandate has yet to issue, and thus not properly relied upon as precedent.”).

BACKGROUND

This habeas petition was filed by Iliana Viera Alonso, the long-term partner of Mr. Cruz, who claims next friend standing. ECF No. 1 ¶ 3. Ms. Viera Alonso alleges that next friend standing is proper here because she claims that Petitioner is “unable to litigate this action on his own behalf due to his detention, lack of access to legal resources, and psychological distress.” *Id.* at 3. She claims that she has “a significant pre-existing relationship with Petitioner and is truly dedicated to his best interests.” *Id.*

Petitioner, who is Cuban, is detained removal proceedings in ICE custody in Karnes City, Texas. ECF No. 1 at 2; *see also* <https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/en/> (last accessed Feb. 26, 2026). Petitioner was ordered removed by an immigration judge on September 16, 2025, but he timely appealed that decision to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) on September 25, 2025. *Id.* His removal order, therefore, is not yet final, and he remains detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A).³ Petitioner argues that his detention “has exceeded reasonable temporal limits and lacks a legitimate governmental justification” in violation of the Due Process Clause. *Id.* He further claims that his arrest without a judicial warrant violates the Fourth Amendment. *Id.* at 4. He seeks release from custody or an immediate individualized bond hearing. *Id.* at 5. Petitioner filed this habeas petition on or about January 5, 2026.

ARGUMENT

As a threshold issue, Respondents deny that Ms. Viera Alonso has established next friend standing. She provides no evidence of her relationship with Petitioner or Petitioner’s

³ A timely appealed removal order is not final unless or until the BIA affirms the order. 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(47)(B)(i).

inaccessibility, other than her own declaration. This Court could deny the habeas on this basis alone.

A. Mandatory Detention under § 1225(b) Is Facially Constitutional.

In upholding the facial constitutionality of § 1225(b) the Supreme Court in *Thuraissigiam* found that applicants for admission are entitled only to the protections set forth by statute in the INA. *Dep't of Homeland Sec. v. Thuraissigiam*, 91 U.S. 103, 140 (2020). Mandatory detention of an applicant for admission during “full” removal proceedings does not violate due process, because constitutional protections are built into those proceedings. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1229a; *see Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 526 (2003) (recognizing the constitutionality of detention during the limited period of removal proceedings). Consistent with the Supreme Court’s long-standing precedent, the Fifth Circuit in *Buenrostro* opined that *Zadvydas* did not apply equally to detained pre-removal-order aliens who received or were receiving due process through removal proceedings. *Buenrostro*, at *9; *see also Perez Sanchez v. Vergara, et al*, No. 5:26–CV–626–MA (W.D. Tex. Feb. 24, 2026) (denying habeas petition to alien seeking administrative review of a removal order, finding that no substantive due process right to release attaches and that the sole procedural protection afforded is the review of the underlying removal order itself).⁴

B. Petitioner Does Not State a Viable Procedural Due Process Claim.

A procedural-due-process claim takes as given the substantive determinations that would justify a deprivation of life, liberty, or property, but challenges the “adequacy of the[] procedures” for making those determinations. *Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 335 (1976).⁵ By contrast, a

⁴ The petitioner in *Perez Sanchez* was in the same procedural posture as this Petitioner at the time Judge Alvarez issued her decision denying habeas relief.

⁵ Respondents do not concede that *Mathews* provides the appropriate framework in this case.

substantive due process claim challenges the substance of the determinations themselves, arguing that they are inadequate to justify the deprivation “at all, no matter what process is provided.” *Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292, 302 (1993). Indeed, asserting “a right to a hearing under the Due Process Clause” requires a showing that “the facts they seek to establish in that hearing are relevant under the statutory scheme.” *Connecticut Department of Pub. Safety v. Doe*, 538 U.S. 1, 9 (2003). Petitioner here alleges no facts that would be relevant under § 1225(b)(2).

Petitioner has not challenged the adequacy of the procedures for determining whether he is properly described as an “applicant for admission,” a matter determined in immigration removal proceedings, which subjects Petitioner to mandatory detention under §1225(b)(2)(A). Instead, Petitioner argues that his inclusion within the scope of a mandatory detention provision (§1225(b)(2)(A)) is a constitutionally insufficient basis on which to justify the deprivation of liberty. Petitioner’s due process argument is, therefore, substantive, not procedural. Because § 1225(b)(2)(A) requires mandatory detention regardless of criminal history, Petitioner’s claim challenges the substance of the law, not the procedure. Congress imposed mandatory detention on all applicants for admission, and due process does not require procedures to adjudicate immaterial facts. What Petitioner is asking this Court to do is override Congress’s substantive judgment that all applicants for admission must be detained regardless of whether they are dangerous or flight risks. Procedural due process can do no such thing.

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Connecticut Department of Public Safety v. Doe*, 538 U.S. 1 (2003), is definitively on point. The statute in that case required sex offenders to register with the State so their information could be published on a sex-offender registry. *Id.* at 4-5. John Doe, who had previously been convicted of a sex offense, claimed that the statute violated his procedural-due-process rights by requiring him to register without a “hearing to determine

whether” he was “currently dangerous.” *Id.* at 4 (citation omitted). The Court rejected Doe’s claim, explaining that “due process does not require the opportunity to prove a fact that is not material to [a] statutory scheme....” *Id.* at 7. Whether Doe was currently dangerous was “of no consequence” because the statute required him to register based on his prior conviction alone. *Id.* Without a showing that the law conflicted with the Constitution, any hearing on current dangerousness would be “a bootless exercise.” *Id.* at 8.

Detainees who assert a right to a due process hearing must show that the facts they seek to establish in that hearing are relevant under the statutory scheme. *Conn. Dep’t of Pub. Safety*, 538 U.S. at 9; *Duarte v. City of Lewisville, Texas*, 858 F.3d 348 (5th Cir. 2017). The Fifth Circuit later applied that same rationale to reject a procedural due process challenge to mandatory detention under §1226(c) for removal proceedings in *Wekesa v. U.S. Attorney*, No. 22-10260, 2022 WL 17175818 (5th Cir. Nov. 22, 2022). There, *Wekesa* filed a habeas petition, alleging that “his continued detention without an individualized bond hearing violates his due process rights.” *Id.* at *1. The Court rejected that claim. Because *Wekesa* indisputably was subject to detention under §1226(c), nothing he hoped to ascertain through a bond hearing would be “relevant under the statutory scheme.” *Conn. Dep’t of Pub. Safety*, 538 U.S. at 9.

Accordingly, Petitioner has no procedural due process right to a bond hearing on flight risk or danger to the community where those issues are irrelevant under §1225(b)(2). Petitioner falls squarely within the plain language of the statute as interpreted by *Buenrostro-Mendez*. Therefore, any claim that Petitioner is entitled to a bond hearing “‘must ultimately be analyzed’ in terms of substantive, not procedural, due process.” *Conn. Dep’t of Pub. Safety*, 538 U.S. at 7-8; see *Flores*, 507 U.S. at 308 (holding that a challenge to a regulation on the ground that it failed to require a determination of a detainee’s “interests” was “just [a] ‘substantive due process’ argument recast

in ‘procedural due process’ terms”); *Michael H. v. Gerald D.*, 491 U.S. 110, 119, 121 (1989) (plurality opinion) (treating a request for an “evidentiary hearing” on an issue that the statutory scheme deemed “irrelevant” as a “substantive due process” claim).

C. Even if Petitioner Were Asserting a Viable Procedural Due Process Claim, It Lacks Merit.

The Supreme Court has made clear that *lawful admission*—not physical entry—is the touchstone for when aliens gain due process interests that could potentially require procedures beyond what Congress has provided. In *Landon v. Plascencia*, 459 U.S. 21, 32 (1982), the Court observed that only “*once an alien gains admission to our country and begins to develop the ties that go with permanent residence [does] his constitutional status change[.]*” (emphasis added). “Th[is] rule,” the Court explained, “rests on [the] fundamental proposition” that “the power to admit or exclude aliens is a sovereign prerogative,” and “the Constitution gives the political department of the government plenary authority to decide which aliens to admit.” *Id.* at 32; *see also Nishimura Ekiu*, 142 U.S. at 659.

This understanding that additional procedures can be required only for those who have been lawfully *admitted* was confirmed years before in *Kaplan v. Tod*, 267 U.S. 228 (1925), a habeas case where a child sought release from immigration custody. There, the Supreme Court held that a child lawfully *paroled* into the care of relatives *for nearly nine years*—but never lawfully *admitted*—must be “regarded as stopped at the boundary line” and “had gained no foothold in the United States.” *Id.* at 230-31. That was so even though the child had been living in the interior of the country with her naturalized-citizen father and presumably forming connections to the United States. *Id.* at 229. Still, because the child had never been lawfully admitted, the Due Process Clause did not require *any* additional procedures beyond what Congress provided. *Id.* at 229-30.

As the Fifth Circuit recognized, by enacting §1225(b)(2)(A), Congress sought to eliminate the preferential treatment of aliens who violate the country's immigration laws. 2026 WL 323330, at *9. Under Petitioner's argument, aliens who violate federal law would enjoy *greater* constitutional protections than those who comply with it. The Constitution should not be manipulated to allow an alien to adversely possess additional due process rights by virtue of unlawfully entering the United States—especially when the nine years of *lawful* presence of a *child* in *Kaplan* did not suffice.

D. Petitioner Does Not Have a Substantive Due Process Right to a Bond Hearing.

Petitioner does not purport to identify any fundamental right⁶ to which he is entitled. *Assaad v. Ashcroft*, 387 F.3d 471, 475–76 (5th Cir. 2004) (collecting cases and finding that the failure to receive discretionary relief in removal proceedings does not amount to a deprivation of a liberty interest). As such, his substantive due process claim must fail so long as mandatory detention under §1225(b)(2)(A) is “rationally related to legitimate government interests.” *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 728 (1997). Reversing the lower court's finding that the petitioner in *Demore* had shown an as-applied constitutional challenge while in pre-removal-order detention, the Supreme Court concluded that since removal proceedings were ongoing, detention was “a constitutionally permissible part” of the removal process. *Id.* at 530. Petitioner's detention without a bond hearing during the pendency of removal proceedings does not implicate any fundamental rights. “[P]rior to 1907 there was no provision permitting bail for any aliens during the pendency of their deportation proceedings,” *Demore*, 538 U.S. at 523 n.7, so such a

⁶ To the extent Petitioner challenges the conditions of his confinement, he does not state a valid due process claim on that basis. *See Akbar v. Barr*, No. 20–CV–1132–FB, 2021 WL 1345530 at *4 (W.D. Tex. Mar. 5, 2021) (citing *Rice v. Gonzalez*, 985 F.3d 1069 (5th Cir. 2021)).

right cannot possibly be “objectively, deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and tradition.” *Dep’t of State v. Muñoz*, 602 U.S. 899, 910 (2024) (quoting *Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. at 720-21). Accordingly, rational-basis review is the appropriate standard for analyzing respondents’ substantive-due-process claims. *Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. at 728. Under that standard, detention under §1225(b)(2) is constitutionally permissible if it is “rationally related to legitimate government interests.” *Id.*

Section 1225 clears the rational basis test. Petitioner does not allege that removal is “unattainable” like it was in *Zadvydas*, so detention under §1225(b)(2)(A) serves the same legitimate interest recognized by *Demore* in the context of § 1226(c)—preventing” aliens “from fleeing prior to or during their removal proceedings, thus increasing the change that, if ordered removed, the aliens will be successfully removed.” 538 U.S. at 528. As *Buenrostro-Mendez* recognized, “the Department of Justice Inspector General found in 1997 that ‘when aliens are released from custody, nearly 90 percent abscond and are not removed from the United States,’” and “[t]hat situation exists today at a much larger scale.” 2026 WL 323330, at *9 (quoting 62 Fed. Reg. 10312, 10323 (Mar. 6, 1997)).

Nor is detention under §1225(b)(2)(A) “indefinite” or “permanent.” *Demore*, 538 U.S. at 530. As with §1226(c), detention under §1225(b)(2)(A) lasts only for the duration of “a proceeding under section 1229a of this title.” 8 U.S.C. §1225(b)(2)(A); see *Jennings*, 583 U.S. at 302-03. While the immigration proceedings remain pending, Petitioner’s detention under § 1225(b)(2) bears a reasonable relation to the legitimate purposes that this Court identified in *Demore*.

While he complains that his current detention violates due process, Petitioner does not contest that he is removable. Moreover, Petitioner makes no showing that removal proceedings and corresponding detention during those proceedings are unconstitutional as applied to him. He

makes no allegations that he is being deprived of the right to counsel in removal proceedings. Indeed, the charging document would have notified him of the allegations and charge against him, and Petitioner is already seeking judicial review at the BIA of the adverse removal decision against him, which he may also challenge at the Fifth Circuit. As applied here to Petitioner, therefore, detention for the purpose of removal proceedings does not violate substantive due process.

District courts in this Circuit have also dismissed due process concerns in similar contexts. *See, e.g., Lopez Jaimes v. Lyons, et al*, No. 26–CV–686–MA (W. D. Tex. Feb. 17, 2026) (Alvarez, J.) (finding no due process violation where applicant for admission with expired parole was taken back into custody on a mandatory basis during removal proceedings); *Calderon Lopez v. Lyons*, No. 1:25-CV-226-H, 2026 WL 44683 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 7, 2026) (Hendrix, J.) (holding that nothing in the INA or Due Process Clause contradicts mandatory detention of applications for admission without bond under § 1225); *Rivera Hernandez v. Noem*, No. 9:25-CV-00326, 2025 WL 3754434 (E.D. Tex. Dec. 19, 2025) (Truncale, J.) (holding that § 1225, as the more specific statute, governs petitioner’s detention, which does not violate due process as it has not been shown to be indefinite); *Jimenez v. Thompson*, No. 4:25-CV-05026, 2025 WL 3265493 (S.D. Tex. Nov. 24, 2025) (Eskridge, J.) (rejecting petitioner’s argument that mandatory detention without bond hearing violates substantive due process).

E. Fourth Amendment Claim Is Not Cognizable in Habeas.

Petitioner argues that the circumstances of Petitioner’s initial arrest violated the Fourth Amendment. *See* ECF No. 1 at 4. These claims are not cognizable through habeas. The circumstances of Petitioner’s *initial* arrest are not relevant in this habeas petition, which vests jurisdiction in this Court solely to review the legal propriety of Petitioner’s *current detention*.

The question in habeas proceedings is not whether detention was unlawful in the past.

“[T]he great and central office of the writ of habeas corpus is to test the *legality of the prisoner's current detention*.” *Walker v. Wainwright*, 390 U.S. 335, 336 (1968) (emphasis added). In habeas, the Court does not review all possible previous errors; it asks only whether the confinement is justified. *See Lane v. Williams*, 455 U.S. 624, 631, (1982) (explaining that where detainment or its consequences have expired, a habeas petition is moot); *Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 489 (1973) (distinguishing between backward-looking remedies and habeas); *Lindh v. Murphy*, 521 U.S. 320, 342, (contrasting backward-looking actions like damages with “the writ of habeas corpus is prospective in nature,” and it “does not compensate for past wrongful incarceration ...”) (Scalia, J., dissenting). Whatever the circumstances and facts before now, they are not relevant to resolution of the legality of the current detention. Petitioner is subject to mandatory detention under § 1225(b)(2) until his removal proceedings conclude. Unless and until he can show he is not subject to removal proceedings, his detention is lawful.

CONCLUSION

This case fits squarely within the Fifth Circuit’s reasoning in *Buenrostro*, which held that applicants for admission are properly detained on a mandatory basis under § 1225(b)(2). *Buenrostro*, 2026 WL 323330 at *1. Petitioner fails to show that his mandatory detention is unconstitutional as applied to him, as he is receiving the process he is owed during removal proceedings. In any event, the orderly legal administration of this issue is now properly before the federal appellate courts and is being given the urgency that questions of detention deserve. Respondents respectfully request that the Court deny this petition.

Respectfully submitted,

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Certificate of Service

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