

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
JACKSONVILLE DIVISION

RIGOBERTO MENDOZA LORENZO,

Petitioner,

v.

Case No.: 3:26-cv-126-JEP-PDB

RONNIE WOODALL,¹ Warden, Baker Correctional Institution; **GARRETT RIPA**, in his official capacity as Field Office Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Miami Field Office; **KRISTI NOEM**, in her official capacity as the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security; **PAM BONDI**, in her official capacity as Attorney General of the United States; **Todd M. Lyons**, Acting Director U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement,²

Respondents.

RESPONSE TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS

Petitioner Rigoberto Mendoza Lorenzo challenges his detention by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), arguing that he is entitled to

¹ The individual having physical custody of a petitioner is the only appropriate respondent. 8 U.S.C. § 2243; *Rumsfeld v. Padilla*, 542 U.S. 426, 434-36 (2004); *Vandersnick v. Sec'y, Fla. Dep't of Corr.*, No. 5:18-cv-603-SPC-PRL, 2021 WL 1020914, at *1 n.3 (M.D. Fla. Mar. 17, 2021). Any relief the Court awards should be fashioned within the power of the immediate custodian or ICE/DHS. *See, e.g., Mirando Bravo v. Noem*, No. 2:25-cv-1046-SPC-DNF, Doc. 8 at *3 (M.D. Fla. Dec. 5, 2025) (ordering ICE *either* to bring petitioner for a bond hearing or release by a specific date).

Ronnie Woodall was the warden at the Baker Correctional Institution when it was operated by the State of Florida as a men's prison in Sanderson, FL. *See* www.fdle.state.fl.us. Ronnie Woodall was not and is not the warden or facility administrator at the North Florida Detention Center (NFDC) operated in the now shuttered Baker Correctional Institution in Sanderson, FL. Based on information and belief, the Facility Administrator of the NFDC is Eric Hall. **Thus, Petitioner is in the custody of Eric Hall**, not Ronnie Woodall.

a release from custody or a bond hearing. The argument relies on 8 U.S.C. § 1226. This Court has previously addressed the applicability of § 1225 v. § 1226 to persons such as Petitioner who are subject to mandatory detention by ICE without the possibility of obtaining bond. 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 the Federal Respondents' arguments and conserve scarce judicial resources. Should the Court prefer a fulsome discussion or entertain reconsidering its rulings on § 1226, the Federal Respondents stand ready to submit additional briefing.

Background

Rigoberto Mendoza Lorenzo is a 41-year-old Mexican national who entered the United States as an adult over 20 years ago without inspection, admission, or parole. See Doc. 1 at 1, ¶ 20; *See also* Attachment A at 1. On December 30, 2025, law enforcement officers took Mendoza Lorenzo into ICE custody. *See* Exhibit B at 2. Since December 30, 2025 Petitioner has been in ICE custody for 58 days and remains detained at the North Florida Detention Center in Sanderson, Florida. *See* Doc. 2 at 2, ¶ 5.

On December 30, 2025, Petitioner was initially encountered by St. Johns County Sheriff's Deputies during a traffic stop. *See* Exhibit B at 2. Law enforcement officers took Petitioner into custody after determining that Petitioner was unlawfully present in the United States in violation of INA § 212(a)(6)(A). *Id.* at 2.

Certified Habeas Return

ICE is detaining Mendoza Lorenzo under the mandatory detention provisions of 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2). *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2243 (stating “[t]he person to whom the writ or order is directed shall make a return certifying the true cause of the detention.”). Petitioner 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

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 INA’s statutory scheme, Supreme Court and BIA precedents, 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.

Federal Respondents acknowledge that questions of law in this case substantially overlap with *Juan Miguel Gomez-Pena v. Secretary, DHS*, No. 3:25-cv-1287-MMH-MCR (Doc. 13), 2026 WL 83980 (M.D. Fla. Jan. 12, 2026), and *Hector Gutierrez Ortiz v. Kristi Noem*, No. 3:25-cv-1386-MMH-MCR (Doc. 14), 2025 WL 3653217 (M.D. Fla. Dec. 17, 2025). While the Federal Respondents acknowledge that

their position is the minority in this District and around the country, it should be noted, however, that a growing number of courts have ruled in the Federal Respondents' favor on this issue. *See, E.g., Iraheta Morales v. Noem*, Case No. 25-62598-Civ-Singhal, 2026 WL 236307 (S.D. Fla. Jan. 29, 2026); *Andres Diaz Lopez v. Director of Enforcement and Removal Operations et al.*, Case No. 3:25-cv-1313-JEP-SJH, 2026 WL 261938 (M.D. Fla. Jan. 26, 2026).³

³ See also *Cortez v. Lynch*, No. 1:25-CV-822, 2026 WL 82039 (S.D. Ohio Jan. 12, 2026); *Garibay-Robledo v. Noem*, -- F. Supp. 3d --, No. 1:25-CV-177-H, 2026 WL 81679 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 9, 2026); *Singh v. Noem*, No. 2:25-CV-00157-SCM, 2026 WL 74558 (E.D. Ky. Jan. 9, 2026); *Benitez v. Bradford*, No. 4:25-CV-06178, 2026 WL 82235 (S.D. Tex. Jan. 8, 2026); *Cruz Rodriguez v. Olson*, -- F. Supp. 3d --, No. 1:25-CV-12961, 2026 WL 63613 (N.D. Ill. Jan. 8, 2026); *D.M.R.D. v. Andrews*, No. 1:26-CV-00081-WBS-CSK, 2026 WL 61504 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 8, 2026); *Calderon Lopez v. Lyons*, No. 1:25-CV-226-H, 2026 WL 44683 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 7, 2026); *Naikpay v. Sukkar*, No. 2:25-CV-1167-KCD-DNF, 2026 WL 44820 (M.D. Fla. Jan. 7, 2026) (Dudek, J.); *Azizzadeh v. Rhoney*, No. 25-CV-1288 (JLS), 2026 WL 44324 (W.D.N.Y. Jan. 6, 2026); *Gutierrez Sosa v. Holt*, No. CIV-25-1257-PRW, 2026 WL 36344 (W.D. Okla. Jan. 6, 2026); *Parra v. Sec'y, DHS*, No. 2:25-CV-1116-KCD-DNF, 2026 WL 21243 (M.D. Fla. Jan. 5, 2026) (Dudek, J.); *Rodriguez v. Jeffreys*, No. 8:25CV714, 2025 WL 3754411 (D. Neb. Dec. 29, 2025); *Zuniga v. Lyons*, No. 1:25-CV-221-H, 2025 WL 3755126 (N.D. Tex. Dec. 29, 2025); *Montoya v. Holt*, No. CIV-25-01231-JD, 2025 WL 3733302 (W.D. Okla. Dec. 26, 2025); *Pastor v. Dir. of Detroit Field Off.*, No. 4:25-CV-02761, 2025 WL 3746495 (N.D. Ohio Dec. 24, 2025); *Masis Lucero, v. Field Office Director of Enforcement and Removal Operations*, No. 1:25-CV-823, 2025 WL 3718730 (S.D. Ohio Dec. 23, 2025); *A.M. v. Joyce*, No. 2:25-CV-00615-LEW, 2025 WL 3706922 (D. Me. Dec. 22, 2025); *Calderon Lopez v. Lyons*, No. 1:25-CV-226-H, 2025 WL 3683918 (N.D. Tex. Dec. 19, 2025); *Rivera Hernandez v. Noem*, No. 9:25-CV-00326, 2025 WL 3754434 (E.D. Tex. Dec. 19, 2025); *Zapata v. Chestnut*, No. 1:25-CV-01922-WBS-CKD, 2025 WL 3687643 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 19, 2025); *Bartolon v. Bondi*, No. 1:25-CV-747, 2025 WL 3674604 (S.D. Ohio Dec. 18, 2025); *E.R.J.B. v. Wofford*, No. 1:25-CV-01843-WBS-SCR, 2025 WL 3683118 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 18, 2025); *Romero Rebolledo v. Chestnut*, No. 1:25-CV-01904-WBS-CKD, 2025 WL 3683122 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 18, 2025); *Padilla v. Galovich*, No. 25-CV-865-JDP, 2025 WL 3640960 (W.D. Wis. Dec. 16, 2025); *Coronado v. Sec'y, DHS*, No. 1:25-CV-831, 2025 WL 3628229 (S.D. Ohio Dec. 15, 2025); *Liang v. Almodovar*, No. 1:25-cv-09322, 2025 WL 3641512 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 15, 2025); *P. B. v. Bergami*, No. 3:25-CV-02978-O, 2025 WL 3632752 (N.D. Tex. Dec. 13, 2025); *Delgado v. Noem*, No. 9:25-CV-00329, 2025 WL 3639439 (E.D. Tex. Dec. 12, 2025); *Garcia v. U.S. Attn'y Gen.*, No. 2:25-CV-1053-KCD-DNF, 2025 WL 3537592 (M.D. Fla. Dec. 10, 2025) (Dudek, J.); *Rodriguez v. Noem*, No. 9:25-CV-00320, 2025 WL 3639440 (E.D. Tex. Dec. 10, 2025); *Oliveria v. Albarran*, No. 1:25-CV-01760 WBS AC, 2025 WL 3525923 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 9, 2025); *Ugarte-Arenas v. Olson*, No. 25-C-1721, 2025 WL 3514451 (E.D. Wis. Dec. 8, 2025); *Melgar v. Bondi*, No. 8:25CV555, 2025 WL 3496721 (D. Neb. Dec. 5, 2025); *Candido v. Bondi*, No. 25-CV-867, 2025 WL 3484932 (W.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2025); *Chen v. Almodovar*, No. 1:25-cv-08350, 2025 WL 3484855 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2025); *Topal v. Bondi*, No. 1:25-cv-01612, 2025 WL 3486894 (W.D. La. Dec. 3,

Significantly, the Fifth Circuit recently ruled that aliens who have not been admitted to the United States are subject to mandatory detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2) regardless of whether the alien is already present in the United States. *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, No. 25-20496, 2026 WL 323330 (5th Cir. Feb. 6, 2026). As the battle of the string cites builds, there is clearly a split amongst district courts across the country on applying § 1225 or § 1226 in these instances. Currently, there are active appeals regarding this issue in the Eleventh Circuit, *see Hernandez Alvarez v. Warden, Federal Detention Center Miami et al.*, No. 25-14065 (11th Cir.), and *Cerro Perez v. Assistant Field Office Director, Krome North Service Processing Center, et al.*, No. 25-14075 (11th Cir.),⁴ and active appeals in at least three other circuits, *Martinez v. Hyde*, No.

2025); *Cruz v. Noem*, No. 8:25-CV-02566, 2025 WL 3482630 (C.D. Cal. Dec. 2, 2025); *Suarez v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-00202-JMD, 2025 WL 3312168, at *2-3 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 28, 2025); *Cortes Alonzo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-01519 WBS SCR, 2025 WL 3208284, at *1-5 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 17, 2025); *Manzo Valencia v. Chestnut*, No. 1:25-cv-01550 WBS JDP, 2025 WL 3205133, at *1-4 (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); *Garibay-Robledo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-00177-H (Doc. 9) (N.D. Tex. Oct. 24, 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-23250CAB-SBC, 2025 WL 2730228 at *4-5 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2025).

⁴ *See Hernandez Alvarez v. Warden, Federal Detention Center Miami, et al.*, Case No. 1:25-cv-24806-KMW (S.D. Fla. Oct. 27, 2025); *Cerro Perez v. Assistant Field Office Director, Krome North Service Processing Center, et al.*, Case No. 1:25-cv-24820-KMW (S.D. Fla. Oct. 27, 2025).

25-1902 (1st Cir.); *Pizzaro Reyes v. ERO*, No. 25-1982 (6th Cir.); *Cortes Alonzo v. Noem*, No. 25-7348 (9th Cir.).⁵

The Federal Respondents believe that the Court's decision in *Lopez* should guide its decision here, and that the instant Petition should be denied. As a result, in the interest of judicial economy and to expedite the Court's consideration of this matter, Federal Respondents make the following arguments for preservation purposes:

1. 8 U.S.C. § 1252(g) bars review of Mendoza Lorenzo's claims. *Diaz Lopez*, Case No. 3:25-cv-1313-JEP-SJH (Doc. 7, p. 4-7).⁶
2. 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9) bars review of these claims. *Id.* at 7.
3. Mendoza Lorenzo is properly detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1225. *Id.* at 8-20.

Should the Court determine Mendoza Lorenzo'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 Mendoza Lorenzo is a flight risk or danger to the community. *See, e.g., Vasquez Carcamo*, 2025 WL 3119263, at *5-6.

⁵ *See Martinez v. Hyde*, 792 F. Supp. 3d 211 (D. Mass. 2025); *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, No. H-25-3726, 2025 WL 2886346 (S.D. Tex. Oct. 7, 2025); *Pizzaro Reyes v. ERO*, No. 25-cv-12546, 2025 WL 2609425 (E.D. Mich. Sept. 9, 2025); *Cortes Alonzo v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-01519 WBS SCR, 2025 WL 3208284 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 17, 2025).

⁶ Federal 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.

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

Mendoza Lorenzo'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.

Dated: February 25, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

GREGORY W. KEHOE
United States Attorney

/s/ Charlie D. Connally
Charlie D. Connally
Assistant United States Attorney
Florida Bar No. 098475
300 North Hogan Street, Suite 700
Jacksonville, FL 32202-4270
Telephone No. (904) 301-6322/6300
Facsimile No. (904) 301-6240
Email: charlie.connally@usdoj.gov
Attorneys for Federal Respondents

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on February 25, 2026, I electronically filed the foregoing document with the Clerk of the Court by using the CM/ECF system:

Evelyn J. Pabon Figueroa, Esq.
Francisco F. Symphorien-Saavedra, Esq.

/s/ *Charlie D. Connally*
Charlie D. Connally
Assistant United States Attorney