

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA**

CELESTINO FLORA-TORRES

Petitioner,

v.

RONNIE WOODALL, in his official
capacity as Warden of the Florida Baker
Correctional Facility; GARRET
RIPA, in his official capacity as Miami Field
Office Director, Immigration and Customs
Enforcement's Enforcement and Removal
Operations; TODD LYONS, in his official
capacity as Acting Director of Immigration
and Customs Enforcement; KRISTI NOEM,
in her official capacity as Secretary of the
Department of Homeland Security;
PAMELA BONDI, in her official capacity
as Attorney General, and EXECUTIVE
OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW

Respondents.

No. 3:26-cv-00154-JEP-LLL

**PETITIONER'S OPPOSITION TO RESPONDENT RONNIE WOODALL'S
MOTION TO DISMISS**

INTRODUCTION

On January 27, 2026, Petitioner Celestino Flora-Torres filed a Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241. Doc. 1. Respondent Ronnie Woodall submitted a Motion to Dismiss¹ for improper respondent. Doc. 10. Respondent rejected the immediate custodian rule by claiming he lacks any control over Petitioner without Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) direction. *See generally* Doc 10.

ARGUMENT

RESPONDENT RONNIE WOODALL, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS WARDEN OF BAKER CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION, IS A PROPER RESPONDENT.

Habeas corpus exists to ensure an effective remedy for unlawful detention under federal law, with relief taking the form of release from custody or a bond hearing to assess whether continued detention is warranted. To effectuate that remedy, the named respondents must possess the authority to release the petitioner. As the Supreme Court emphasized in *Boumediene v. Bush*, habeas requires a

¹ Respondent cited F.R.C.P. 12(b)(6), which allows for dismissal of a pleading for “failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted”, however, there are no allegations of lack of injury, lack of factual basis, or lack of potential remedy. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6). Respondent claims to be the improper respondent, and requests to be dismissed from the proceedings. Doc. 10. F.R.C.P. 21 explains that “[m]isjoinder of parties is not a ground for dismissing an action. On motion or on its own, the court may at any time, on just terms, add or drop a party. The court may also sever any claim against a party.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 21.

respondent with the power to provide relief, including release. 553 U.S. 723, 779 (2008). Immigration detention presents unique considerations where the legal and physical custody of a petitioner may be split amongst separate respondents.

In *Rumsfeld v. Padilla*, it was established that “[t]he federal habeas statute straightforwardly provides that the proper respondent to a habeas petition is ‘the person who has custody over the petitioner.’” 542 U.S. 426, 434 (2004) (citing 28 U.S.C. §§ 2242, 2243). Accordingly, the warden or facility administrator who exercises day-to-day control over the detainee qualifies as an immediate custodian and must be included as a respondent to satisfy the traditional habeas requirement that the court have jurisdiction over the custodian capable of producing the petitioner. *Id.* at 435.

The *Padilla* court noted in footnote 8 that it was not resolving whether the immediate-custodian rule governs immigration detention, recognizing that immigration presents unique considerations. 542 U.S. 426, 435 n.8 (2004). By leaving that question open, the *Padilla* court signaled that the unique statutory framework governing immigration detention may justify recognizing federal supervisory officials as proper respondents *alongside* the immediate custodian.

Permitting both officials with physical custody of Petitioner and officials with legal custody of Petitioner reconciles the immediate custodian rule with the structure of immigration detention and allows for an effective remedy. *See Aguilar*

Hernandez v. Noem, et al., No. 2:26-CV-136-KCD-NPM, 2026 WL 501952, at *2 n. 2 (M.D. Fla. Feb. 24, 2026) (“When the Government splits the atom of custody—giving physical control to a local jailer but keeping all legal and administrative authority in the hands of federal agencies—the Court is not going to let the responsible parties off the hook based on a technicality. Because it remains unclear which specific federal or local official must push the button to grant the required bond hearing or facilitate Petitioner’s release, all named defendants will remain in this case.”).

Thus, as previously held in this district, Ronnie Woodall in his official capacity as Warden of the Florida Baker Correctional Facility is a proper respondent. *Arenas v. Noem*, No. 2:26-cv-00617, 2026 WL 770569 (M.D. Fla. Mar. 18, 2026) (finding that the warden of the detention facility where the petitioner was detained was not entitled to dismissal as he was the proper respondent).

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, this Court should deny Respondent Ronnie Woodall’s Motion to Dismiss him from these proceedings.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Kenia Garcia

Kenia Garcia, Esq.

Florida Bar No. 102561

Garcia & Qayum Law Group, P.A.

3475 West Flagler Street

Miami, FL 33135

(305) 230-4020 Tel

(786) 506-1120 Cell

(305) 503-7370 Fax

Kenia@GQLawGroup.com

Counsel for Petitioner

Dated: April 2, 2026

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on April 2, 2026, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court by using the CM/ECF system.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Kenia Garcia

Kenia Garcia, Esq.

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Counsel for Petitioner