

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
COLOMBUS DIVISION

SANDRA LETICIA MATUTE
PONCE,

Petitioner,

v.

LADEON FRANCIS, Field Office
Director of Enforcement and Removal
Operations, ATLANTA Field Office,
TODD LYONS, in his official capacity
as Acting director of Immigration and
Customs Enforcement;
Immigration and Customs Enforcement;
MARK MULLIN, Secretary, U.S.
Department of Homeland Security; U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND
SECURITY;
TODD BLANCHE, U.S. Attorney
General; EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR
IMMIGRATION REVIEW;
JASON STREEVAL, Warden of
STEWART DETENTION CENTER,

Respondents.

Case No. 4:26-cv-904

**PETITION FOR WRIT OF
HABEAS CORPUS**

INTRODUCTION

1. Petitioner SANDRA LETICIA MATUTE PONCE is in the physical custody of Respondents at the STEWART DETENTION CENTER. She now faces unlawful detention because the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in direct collaboration with the adjudicative body with jurisdiction over immigrants (the Executive Office of Immigration Review) (EOIR) have concluded Petitioner is subject to mandatory detention.

2. Petitioner is charged with, inter alia, having entered the United States without admission or inspection. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(6)(A)(i).

3. Based on this allegation in Petitioner's removal proceedings, DHS has prevented Petitioner's release from immigration custody, consistent with a new DHS policy issued on July 8, 2025, instructing all Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) employees to consider anyone inadmissible under § 1182(a)(6)(A)(i)—i.e., those who entered the United States without admission or inspection—to be subject to detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) and therefore ineligible to be released on bond.

4. On September 5, 2025, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA or Board) issued a precedent decision, binding on all immigration judges, holding that an immigration judge has no authority to consider bond requests for any person who entered the United States without admission. *See Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, 29 I. & N. Dec. 216 (BIA 2025). The Board determined that such individuals are subject to detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) and therefore ineligible to be released on bond.

5. Petitioner's detention on this basis violates the plain language of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Section 1225(b)(2)(A) does not apply to individuals like Petitioner who previously entered and are now residing in the United States. Instead, such

1 individuals are subject to a different statute, § 1226(a), that allows for release on
2 conditional parole or bond. That statute expressly applies to people who, like Petitioner,
3 are charged as inadmissible for having entered the United States without inspection.

4 6. Respondents' new legal interpretation is plainly contrary to the statutory
5 framework and contrary to decades of agency practice applying § 1226(a) to people like
6 Petitioner.

7 7. More importantly, the Government itself has made an abrupt about-face on
8 this issue. Respondents should be judicially estopped from asserting their current
9 interpretation of 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A), because they previously prevailed in litigation
10 after asserting the opposite interpretation. As explained in *New Hampshire v. Maine*, 532
11 U.S. 742 (2001), judicial estoppel applies when a party assumes a position in a legal
12 proceeding, succeeds in maintaining that position, and then adopts a contrary position in a
13 subsequent proceeding to gain an unfair advantage. Here, Respondents previously, and
14 successfully, argued that individuals who entered the United States without inspection were
15 subject to detention under § 1226(a), and not § 1225(b)(2)(A), and courts accepted that
16 position. Respondents now reverse course and assert that such individuals are subject to
17 mandatory detention under § 1225(b)(2)(A), thereby denying them bond hearings. This
18 shift in legal position undermines the integrity of the judicial process and imposes an unfair
19 detriment on Petitioners who relied on the prior interpretation. Accordingly, Respondents
20 should be estopped from asserting this inconsistent position.

21 8. Furthermore, the Government's own issuance of an I-220A placing
22 Petitioner in custody under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) reflects a discretionary, fact-based
23 determination that Petitioner was not subject to mandatory detention under §

1 1225(b)(2)(A). This quasi judicial decision was made by DHS at the outset of proceedings,
2 based on the facts available to both parties and Petitioner’s own admissions. Critically,
3 DHS itself alleged in the Notice to Appear that Petitioner “entered the United States
4 without inspection and without parole or lawful admission,” a factual assertion that
5 squarely contradicts the Government’s current position—adopted wholesale by the Board
6 of Immigration Appeals that Petitioner is ineligible to apply for bond before EOIR. This
7 reversal undermines the integrity of the adjudicative process and triggers the principles of
8 issue preclusion recognized in *B&B Hardware, Inc. v. Hargis Indus., Inc.*, 575 U.S. 138
9 (2015), which require courts to respect agency determinations when the ordinary elements
10 of preclusion are met.

11 9. Accordingly, Petitioner seeks a writ of habeas corpus requiring that she be
12 released unless Respondents provide a bond hearing under § 1226(a) within seven days.

13 JURISDICTION

14 10. Petitioner is in the physical custody of Respondents. Petitioner is detained at the
15 STEWART DETENTION CENTER in LUMPKIN, GEORGIA.

16 11. This Court has jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 2241(c)(5) (habeas corpus), 28 U.S.C. § 1331
17 (federal question), and Article I, section 9, clause 2 of the United States Constitution (the
18 Suspension Clause).

19 12. This Court may grant relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241, the Declaratory Judgment Act,
20 28 U.S.C. § 2201 *et seq.*, and the All Writs Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1651.

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VENUE

13. Pursuant to *Braden v. 30th Judicial Circuit Court of Kentucky*, 410 U.S. 484, 493- 500 (1973), venue lies in the United States District Court for the MIDDLE DISTRICT OF GEORGIA, the judicial district in which Petitioner currently is detained.

14. Venue is also properly in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e) because Respondents are employees, officers, and agencies of the United States, and because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in the MIDDLE DISTRICT OF GEORGIA.

REQUIREMENTS OF 28 U.S.C. § 2243

15. The Court must grant the petition for writ of habeas corpus or order Respondents to show cause “forthwith,” unless the petitioner is not entitled to relief. 28 U.S.C. § 2243. If an order to show cause is issued, Respondents must file a return “within three days unless for good cause additional time, not exceeding twenty days, is allowed.” *Id.*

16. Habeas corpus is “perhaps the most important writ known to the constitutional law . . . affording as it does a *swift* and imperative remedy in all cases of illegal restraint or confinement.” *Fay v. Noia*, 372 U.S. 391, 400 (1963) (emphasis added). “The application for the writ usurps the attention and displaces the calendar of the judge or justice who entertains it and receives prompt action from him within the four corners of the application.” *Yong v. I.N.S.*, 208 F.3d 1116, 1120 (9th Cir. 2000) (citation omitted).

PARTIES

17. Petitioner Sandra Leticia Matute-Ponce (“Mrs. Matute-Ponce”) is a citizen of Honduras who has been in immigration detention since the of March 11, 2026. Petitioner was attending her I-130 interview with the United States and Immigration Service when she

1 was detained and transferred to the Stewart Detention Center. ICE did not set bond and
2 Petitioner is unable to obtain review of her custody by an IJ, pursuant to the Board's
3 decision in *Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, 29 I. & N. Dec. 216 (BIA 2025). Due to this
4 erroneous decision, it would be futile for Petitioner to apply to EOIR without the
5 intervention of this honorable Court.

6 18. Respondent Todd Lyons is named in his official capacity as the Acting Director of the
7 Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"). As the senior Official Performing the
8 duties of the Director of ICE, he is responsible for the administration and enforcement of
9 the immigration laws of the United States; routinely transacts business in the Southern
10 District of Georgia; is legally responsible for any effort to detain Petitioner; and as such is
11 a custodian of the Petitioner. His address is ICE, Office of the Principal Legal Advisor, 500
12 12th St. SW, Mail Stop 5900, Washington DC 20536-5900.

13 19. Respondent Ladeon Francis is the Director of the Atlanta Field Office of ICE's
14 Enforcement and Removal Operations division; however, on information and belief, the
15 DHS is rotating their Field Office Director without publishing a schedule of rotation. As
16 such, Ladeon Francis or his unknown, unannounced provisional replacement is Petitioner's
17 immediate custodian and is responsible for Petitioner's detention and removal. He or his
18 acting counterpart is named in his or her official capacity. Respondent Francis's address is
19 180 Ted Turner Dr Se, Ste 522. Atlanta GA 30303.

20 20. Respondent Mark Mullin is the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. He is
21 responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the Immigration and Nationality
22 Act (INA), and oversees ICE, which is responsible for Petitioner's detention. Secretary
23 Mullin has ultimate custodial authority over Petitioner and is sued in his official capacity.

1 21. Respondent Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the federal agency responsible for
2 implementing and enforcing the INA, including the detention and removal of noncitizens.

3 22. Respondent Todd Blanche is the Attorney General of the United States. He is responsible
4 for the Department of Justice, of which the Executive Office for Immigration Review and
5 the immigration court system it operates is a component agency. He is sued in his official
6 capacity. Respondent Blanches's address is U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office
7 of the General Counsel, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001.

8 23. Respondent Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) is the federal agency
9 responsible for implementing and enforcing the INA in removal proceedings, including for
10 custody redeterminations in bond hearings.

11 24. Respondent, Warden Jason Streeval is, is employed by the private, for-profit detention
12 corporation contracted by the Government as an agent to confine immigrants at Stewart
13 Detention Center, where Petitioner is detained. He has immediate physical custody of
14 Petitioner. He is sued in his official capacity. Respondent Warden's address is Warden,
15 Stewart Detention Center, 1116 S Washington Ave, Lumpkin, GA 39862.

16 **LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

17 25. The INA prescribes three basic forms of detention for the vast majority of noncitizens in
18 removal proceedings.

19 26. First, 8 U.S.C. § 1226 authorizes the detention of noncitizens in standard removal
20 proceedings before an IJ. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1229a. Individuals in § 1226(a) detention are
21 generally entitled to a bond hearing at the outset of their detention, *see* 8 C.F.R. §§
22 1003.19(a), 1236.1(d), while noncitizens who have been arrested, charged with, or
23 convicted of certain crimes are subject to mandatory detention, *see* 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c).

1 27. Second, the INA provides for mandatory detention of noncitizens subject to expedited
2 removal under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1) and for other recent arrivals seeking admission
3 referred to under § 1225(b)(2).

4 28. Last, the INA also provides for detention of noncitizens who have been ordered removed,
5 including individuals in withholding-only proceedings, *see* 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)–(b).

6 29. This case concerns the detention provisions at §§ 1226(a) and 1225(b)(2).

7 30. The detention provisions at § 1226(a) and § 1225(b)(2) were enacted as part of the Illegal
8 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-
9 –208, Div. C, §§ 302–03, 110 Stat. 3009–546, 3009–582 to 3009–583, 3009–585. Section
10 1226(a) was most recently amended earlier this year by the Laken Riley Act, Pub. L.
11 No.119-1, 139 Stat. 3 (2025).

12 31. Following the enactment of the IIRIRA, EOIR drafted new regulations explaining that, in
13 general, people who entered the country without inspection were not considered detained
14 under § 1225 and that they were instead detained under § 1226(a). *See* Inspection and
15 Expedited Removal of Aliens; Detention and Removal of Aliens; Conduct of Removal
16 Proceedings; Asylum Procedures, 62 Fed. Reg. 10312, 10323 (Mar. 6, 1997).

17 32. Thus, in the decades that followed, most people who entered without inspection and were
18 placed in standard removal proceedings received bond hearings, unless their criminal
19 history rendered them ineligible pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c). That practice was
20 consistent with many more decades of prior practice, in which noncitizens who were not
21 deemed “arriving” were entitled to a custody hearing before an IJ or other hearing officer.

22 *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1252(a) (1994); *see also* H.R. Rep. No. 104-469, pt. 1, at 229 (1996) (noting
23 that § 1226(a) simply “restates” the detention authority previously found at § 1252(a)).

1 33. In *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) explicitly
2 acknowledged that individuals who have already entered the United States and are not
3 apprehended within 100 miles of the border or within 14 days of entry are subject to
4 discretionary detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a), not mandatory detention under § 1225(b).
5 During oral argument on November 30, 2016, then-Solicitor General Ian Gershengorn
6 stated: “If they are not detained within 100 miles of the border or within 14 days... then
7 they are under 1226(a) and not 1226(c)” and further clarified, in response to a question
8 concerning “an alien who has come into the United States illegally without being admitted
9 [and] who takes up residence 50 miles from the border,” the Government responded, “The
10 answer is they are held under 1226(a) and that they get a bond hearing...” Transcript of
11 Oral Argument at 7–8, *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, 583 U.S. ____ (2018) (No. 15-1204). DHS
12 reiterated that such individuals “would be held under 1226(a)” and cited the administrative
13 record to support that position. *Id.* These statements reflect DHS’s prior litigation stance
14 that § 1226(a) governs detention for noncitizens who have entered and are residing in the
15 United States, a position directly contrary to the agency’s current interpretation applying §
16 1225(b)(2)(A) to such individuals. Having prevailed in *Jennings* after taking this position,
17 they should be estopped from taking the contrary position now simply because their
18 political or litigation interests have changed. Estoppel in this case is necessary to preserve
19 the predictability inherent in the rule of law and due process under the Fifth Amendment,
20 as well as to protect the integrity of the judicial system.

21 34. On July 8, 2025, ICE, “in coordination with” DOJ, announced a new policy that rejected
22 well-established understanding of the statutory framework and reversed decades of
23 practice.

1 35. The new policy, entitled “Interim Guidance Regarding Detention Authority for Applicants
2 for Admission,”¹ claims that all persons who entered the United States without inspection
3 shall now be subject to mandatory detention provision under § 1225(b)(2)(A). The policy
4 applies regardless of when a person is apprehended, and affects those who have resided in
5 the United States for months, years, and even decades.

6 36. On September 5, 2025, the BIA adopted this same position in a published decision, *Matter*
7 *of Yajure Hurtado*. There, the Board held that all noncitizens who entered the United States
8 without admission or parole are subject to detention under § 1225(b)(2)(A) and are
9 ineligible for IJ bond hearings.

10 37. Since Respondents adopted their new policies, several federal courts have rejected their
11 new interpretation of the INA’s detention authorities. Courts have likewise rejected *Matter*
12 *of Yajure Hurtado*, which adopts the same reading of the statute as ICE.

13 38. This Court has held in similar cases that petitioners present in the United States at the time
14 of their detention, who have not been lawfully admitted and are not attempting to be
15 lawfully admitted, like the Petitioner, are subject to detention under INA § 1226(a). *J.A.M.*
16 *v. Streeval*, No. 4:25-CV342-CDL, 2025 WL 3050094 (M.D. Ga. Nov. 1, 2025). *P.R.S. v.*
17 *Streeval*, No. 4:25-cv-330-CDL, 2025 WL 3269947 (M.D. Ga. Nov. 24, 2025).

18 39. Moreover, on May 6, 2026, the Eleventh Circuit issued a published decision in *Alvarez v.*
19 *Warden, Federal Detention Center Miami, et al.*, No. 25-14065 (11th Cir. 2026) and *Perez*
20 *v. Assistant Field Office Director, Krome North Service Processing Center, et al.*, (No. 25-
21 14075 (11th Cir. 2026), holding that INA § 1226 applies to unadmitted noncitizens
22 apprehended within the interior of the United States, thereby entitling such individuals to

¹ Available at <https://www.aila.org/library/ice-memo-interim-guidance-regarding-detention-authority-for-applications-for-admission>.

1 bond hearings. The court further held that unadmitted noncitizens encountered in the
2 interior—rather than at the border—and not actively seeking lawful admission are subject
3 to detention under § 1226. However, this decision has not resulted in actual release nor
4 actual bond hearings for detainees in similar circumstances to the Petitioner whom where
5 released on their own recognizance and issued form I-220A placing them in § 236
6 proceedings such as the Petitioner. This demonstrates that judicial intervention is necessary
7 to remedy Petitioner’s ongoing unlawful detention.

8 FACTS

9 40. Mrs. Matute-Ponce has resided in the United States since 2018 and currently resides
10 physically in Lumpkin, Georgia, where she is detained.

11 41. Upon her entry into the United States, the DHS released respondent into the United States
12 presumably on an I-220A form *Order of Release on Recognizance*, or “OREC” and
13 placed her into removal proceedings.

14 42. The DHS filed a Notice to Appear with EOIR alleging that Petitioner entered the United
15 States without inspection.

16 43. On or about March 11, 2026, Mrs. Matute-Ponce was detained by ICE officials.

17 44. Mrs. Matute-Ponce was then transferred to the Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin
18 Georgia where she remains detained.

19 45. Pursuant to *Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, the immigration judge is unable to consider Ms.
20 Perez’s bond request, and her unlawful detention cannot be litigated before that body,
21 who collaborated with the DHS – who is a party to these contested proceedings – to adopt
22 the DHS position wholesale, because such efforts would be futile.

1 46. As a result, Mrs. Matute Ponce remains in detention. Without relief from this court, she
2 faces the prospect of months, or even years, in immigration custody, separated from her
3 family and community while her relief remains pending.

4 **CLAIMS FOR RELIEF**

5 **COUNT I**
6 **Violation of the INA**
7

8
9 47. Petitioner incorporates by reference the allegations of fact set forth in the preceding
10 paragraphs.

11 48. The mandatory detention provision at 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2) does not apply to all
12 noncitizens residing in the United States who are subject to the grounds of inadmissibility.
13 As relevant here, it does not apply to those who received an I-220A and who were
14 subsequently accused by DHS of having “entered” the United States. Those actions by
15 DHS, followed by the Petitioner’s concession to those charges before EOIR, represent a
16 quasi-judicial determination by an agency which precludes further litigation of the issue
17 unless new, material, and previously unavailable facts emerge. Such noncitizens continue
18 to be detained under § 1226(a), unless they are subject to § 1225(b)(1), § 1226(c), or §
19 1231.

20 49. The application of § 1225(b)(2) to Petitioner unlawfully mandates her continued
21 detention and violates the INA.

22 **COUNT II**
23 **Violation of the Bond Regulations**
24

25 50. Petitioner incorporates by reference the allegations of fact set forth in preceding
26 paragraphs.

1 51. In 1997, after Congress amended the INA through IIRIRA, EOIR and the then
2 Immigration and Naturalization Service issued an interim rule to interpret and apply
3 IIRIRA. Specifically, under the heading of “Apprehension, Custody, and Detention of
4 [Noncitizens],” the agencies explained that “[d]espite being applicants for admission,
5 [noncitizens] who are present without having been admitted or paroled (formerly referred
6 to as [noncitizens] who entered without inspection) will be eligible for bond and bond
7 redetermination.” 62 Fed. Reg. at 10323 (emphasis added). The agencies thus made clear
8 that individuals who had entered without inspection were eligible for consideration for
9 bond and bond hearings before IJs under 8 U.S.C. § 1226 and its implementing
10 regulations.

11 52. Nonetheless, pursuant to *Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, EOIR has a policy and practice of
12 applying § 1225(b)(2) to individual like Petitioner.

13 53. The application of § 1225(b)(2) to Petitioner unlawfully mandates her continued
14 detention and violates 8 C.F.R. §§ 236.1, 1236.1, and 1003.19.

15 **COUNT III**
16 **Violation of Due Process**
17

18 54. Petitioner repeats, re-alleges, and incorporates by reference each and every allegation in
19 the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

20 55. The government may not deprive a person of life, liberty, or property without due process
21 of law. U.S. Const. amend. V. “Freedom from imprisonment—from government custody,
22 detention, or other forms of physical restraint—lies at the heart of the liberty that the
23 Clause protects.” *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 690 (2001).

24 56. Petitioner has a fundamental interest in liberty and being free from official restraint.

1 57. The government's detention of Petitioner without a bond redetermination hearing to
2 determine whether he is a flight risk or danger to others violates [his/her/their] right to
3 due process.

4 **Judicial Estoppel**

5 58. Petitioner repeats, re-alleges, and incorporates by reference each and every allegation in
6 the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

7 59. The Government is judicially estopped from asserting that Petitioner is subject to
8 mandatory detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). In prior litigation,
9 including *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, the Government successfully argued that individuals who
10 entered without inspection and were not apprehended near the border or within 14 days
11 were subject to discretionary detention under § 1226(a), not mandatory detention under §
12 1225(b)(2)(A). See *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, No. 15-1204, Tr. of Oral Arg. at 7–8 (Nov. 30,
13 2016). Courts accepted that position. Now, the Government reverses course and asserts the
14 opposite interpretation to deny bond hearings. Under *New Hampshire v. Maine*, 532 U.S.
15 742 (2001), judicial estoppel applies where a party assumes a position, prevails, and then
16 adopts a contrary position to gain an unfair advantage. The Government's reversal
17 undermines the integrity of the judicial process and prejudices Petitioners who relied on
18 the prior interpretation.

19 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

20 WHEREFORE, Petitioner prays that this Court grant the following relief:

- 21 a. Assume jurisdiction over this matter;
-
- 22 b. Order that Petitioner shall not be transferred outside the Middle District of
23 Georgia while this habeas petition is pending;

- 1 c. Issue an Order to Show Cause ordering Respondents to show cause why this
2 Petition should not be granted within three days;
- 3 d. Issue a Writ of Habeas Corpus requiring that Respondents release Petitioner or, in
4 the alternative, provide Petitioner with a bond hearing pursuant to 8 U.S.C. §
5 1226(a) within seven days;
- 6 e. Declare that Petitioner's detention is unlawful;
- 7 f. Award Petitioner attorney's fees and costs under the Equal Access to Justice Act
8 ("EAJA"), as amended, 28 U.S.C. § 2412, and on any other basis justified under
9 law; and
- 10 g. Grant any other and further relief that this Court deems just and proper.

11 DATED this 3rd day of June, 2026.

12 /s/ Peter Tadeo, Esq.
13 Peter Tadeo, Esq.
14 Georgia Bar No. 505253
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28 U.S.C. § 2242 VERIFICATION STATEMENT

I am submitting this verification on behalf of the Petitioner because I am the
Petitioner's attorney. I have discussed with Petitioner's family members and have reviewed various
documents for Petitioner. On the basis of those discussions, I hereby verify that I have reviewed
the foregoing Petition and that the facts and statements made in this Petition and Complaint are
true and correct to the best of my knowledge or belief pursuant to 28 USC § 2242.

DATED this 3rd day of June, 2026.

/s/ Peter Tadeo, Esq.
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