

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
JACKSONVILLE DIVISION

NORLAND RIVERA-AMADOR,

Petitioner/Plaintiff,

v.

Scotty Rhoden, Sheriff of Baker County;
Kristi Noem, Secretary of the Department
of Homeland Security; **Pamela Bondi**,
Attorney General of the U.S.; **Todd M.**
Lyons, Acting Director U.S. Immigration
and Customs Enforcement; **Connie Nolan**,
Director of USCIS Vermont Service Center;
and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration
Services (“USCIS”);

Respondents/Defendants.

VERIFIED PETITION FOR A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS PURSUANT TO 28
U.S.C. § 2241 AND COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE
RELIEF

COMES NOW the petitioner, Norland Rivera-Amador, by and through undersigned
counsel, and hereby brings this Petition and sues the Respondents/Defendants as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. The Petitioner/Plaintiff is a citizen and national of Honduras who is the beneficiary of a deferred action grant by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Services (“USCIS”) arising from the USCIS’s bona fide determination (“BFD”) that the Petitioner/Plaintiff qualifies for U nonimmigrant status for alien victims of certain qualifying activity. *See Exhibit 2*, Copy of USCIS Bona Fide Determination issued June 8, 2022, and copy of the Petitioner/Plaintiff’s current USCIS Employment Authorization Document issued October 12, 2023. 8 U.S.C. §§ 1184(p)(6) and 1103(a) (authority for bona fide discretion process for Petition for U

Nonimmigrant Status (Form I-918)); 8 C.F.R. § 214.14 (regulations for I-918 Petition adjudication); *Reno v. Am.-Arab Anti-Discrimination Comm.*, 525 U.S. 471, 483-84 (1999) (“At each stage [of the deportation process] the Executive has discretion to abandon the endeavor, and at the time [the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996] was enacted the [legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service] had been engaging in a regular practice (which had come to be known as ‘deferred action’) of exercising that discretion for humanitarian reasons or simply for its own convenience”).

2. “Approval of deferred action status means that [...] no action will thereafter be taken to proceed against an apparently deportable alien, even on grounds normally regarded as aggravated.” *Am.-Arab Anti-Discrimination Comm.*, 525 U.S. at 484 (quoting 6 C. Gordon, S. Mailman, & S. Yale-Loehr, *Immigration Law and Procedure* §72.03[2][h] [1998]).

3. Despite the USCIS deferred action grant and compliance with a DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) Enforcement and Removal Operations (“ERO”) Order of Supervision (“OSUP”), the Petitioner/Plaintiff has indicated that the DHS ICE ERO apprehended him on November 14, 2025, in Orlando, Florida, after attending a routine OSUP appointment at the Orlando ICE/ERO office. Petitioner/Plaintiff has been detained since this time at the Baker Detention Center in Baker County, Florida.

4. The Petitioner/Plaintiff challenges his detention as a violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”), 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101 et seq., and regulations thereunder, Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”), and the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.

5. The Petitioner/Plaintiff respectfully requests *inter alia* that this Honorable Court grant him a Writ of Habeas Corpus and order the Respondents/Defendants to release

him from custody, grant a stay of removal, and order other relief as described herein.

6. This action arises under the United States Constitution and the INA. This Honorable Court has jurisdiction over this complaint under: 28 U.S.C. § 2241 (power to grant Writ of Habeas Corpus); the All Writs Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1651; 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (federal question); 28 U.S.C. § 1346 (United States Defendant); the Mandamus Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1361 (jurisdiction to compel an officer to perform a duty owed to Plaintiff); and APA, 5 U.S.C. § 555(b), 5 U.S.C. § 702 (APA waiver of sovereign immunity), 5 U.S.C. § 704 (no other adequate remedy) and 5 U.S.C. § 706 (compel agency action unlawfully withheld or unreasonably delayed).

VENUE

7. Venue is proper in this district under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b), 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(1) (United States defendant resides in this district), 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(2) (cause of action arose in this district), and 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(4) (plaintiff resides in this district and no real property is at issue).

8. Venue lies in the U.S. Middle District of Florida because the Petitioner is currently detained at Baker County Detention Center in Baker, FL, *see* 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391, 2241.

PARTIES

9. Petitioner/Plaintiff RIVERA-AMADOR is a citizen and national of Honduras in the Respondents/Defendants' physical custody. The Respondents/Defendants have assigned Alien Registration No. 

10. The Petitioner/Plaintiff brings a suit against Respondent/Defendant Scotty Rhoden is the Sheriff of Baker County and is being sued in his official capacity. He is the chief law enforcement official in Baker County and the final policymaker for the Baker

County Sheriff's Office. In this position, he has direct authority over the Baker County Detention Center.

11. The Petitioner/Plaintiff brings a suit against Respondent/Defendant Todd M. Lyons, the DHS ICE Acting Director. In this official capacity, he is a legal custodian of the Petitioner/Plaintiff.

12. The Petitioner/Plaintiff brings a suit against Respondent/Defendant Kristi Noem, the DHS Secretary. In this official capacity, she is a legal custodian of the Petitioner/Plaintiff.

13. The Petitioner/Plaintiff brings a suit against Respondent/Defendant Pamela J. Bondi, the Attorney General of the U.S. Department of Justice. In this official capacity, she is a legal custodian of the Petitioner/Plaintiff.

14. The Petitioner/Plaintiff brings a suit against Respondent/Defendant Connie Nolan, the USCIS Vermont Service Center Acting Associate Director. In this official capacity, she is responsible for the USCIS Office with administrative jurisdiction over the Petitioner/Plaintiff's U visa application and deferred action.

15. The Petitioner/Plaintiff brings a suit against Defendant U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) as it is among the DHS agencies responsible for administration of the INA., including the statutory obligation to adjudicate immigration benefits.

CUSTODY

16. The Petitioner/Plaintiff is in the Respondents/Defendants' physical custody district at the Baker County Detention Center, in Baker, Florida, under the direct control of the Respondents/Defendants and their agents.

LEGAL BACKGROUND

A. U Nonimmigrant Status and Deferred Action

17. Congress created the U-nonimmigrant classification as part of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. In enacting this law, Congress recognized that the U-nonimmigrant status process would “facilitate the reporting of crimes to law enforcement officials by trafficked, exploited, victimized, and abused aliens who are not in lawful immigration status” and “give law enforcement officials a means to regularize the status of cooperating individuals during investigations or prosecutions.” See section 1513(a)(2)(B), Public Law No.: 106-386, 114 Stat. 1464.

18. U-nonimmigrant status provides temporary immigration benefits to certain victims of criminal activity who: (1) have suffered substantial mental or physical abuse as a result of having been a victim of criminal activity; (2) have information regarding the criminal activity; and (3) assist government officials in the investigation and prosecution of such criminal activity. 8 U.S.C. § 1184(p)(2).

19. Additionally, the criminal activity must have violated U.S. law or occurred in the United States or its territories and possessions. 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(U)(i).

20. A petitioner for U-nonimmigrant status must submit an application to USCIS with a certification from a law enforcement agency indicating that *inter alia* the petitioner is a victim of qualifying criminal activity and has been, is, or is likely to be helpful in the investigation or prosecution of the relevant criminal activity. 8 U.S.C. § 1184(o); 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(c)(2)(i). The alien also must submit biometric data and a personal statement. 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(c)(2)(ii)-(iii).

21. A final removal order does not remove jurisdiction from USCIS to adjudicate an I- 918 Petition. 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(c)(1)(ii).

22. Pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1184(p)(2), USCIS may only issue 10,000 “U-visas”

per year. *See also* 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(d)(1).

23. “[T]hat cap has been reached each year since 2009.” *De Sousa v. Dir. Of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, 755 F. Supp. 3d 1266, 1268 (N.D. Cal. 2024).

24. In the recent decision in *De Sousa*, the Court explained how Respondent/Defendant USCIS has addressed this problem as follows:

In response, USCIS established a regulatory waiting list process. 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(d)(2). If USCIS determines that a U visa is approvable but cannot be granted “due solely” to the 10,000-person cap, the petitioner “must be placed on [the] waiting list.” *Id.* The wait time for issuance of a U visa is at least seven or eight years. USCIS prioritizes the U visa applications that have been pending the longest. 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(d)(2); USCIS Policy Manual, Vol. 3, Part C, Ch. 7. As of October 2024, USCIS was issuing U visas only for petitions filed in or before November 2016. *See* <https://www.uscis.gov/I918> (last visited November 5, 2024).

But the waiting list has a backlog of its own. In 2020, for example, “the median processing time from receipt of a U visa petition until placement on the waiting list was 50.9 months.” USCIS, Humanitarian Petitions: U Visa Process Timings, Fiscal Year 2021 Report to Congress

(available

<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/reports/USCIS-Humanitarian-Petitions.pdf>). USCIS has been repeatedly sued for allegedly lengthy delays in its issuance of waiting list decisions. *See, e.g., Barrios Garcia v. U.S. Dep’t of Homeland Sec.*, 25 F.4th 430, 452-54 (6th Cir. 2022); *Gonzalez v. Cuccinelli*, 985 F.3d 357, 374-76 (4th Cir. 2021).

Due to the “growing backlog awaiting placement on the waiting list,” USCIS issued a Policy Alert creating an abbreviated, substitute process: a bona fide determination. [...]. The USCIS Policy Manual sets forth the procedures for that process. USCIS “determines whether a petition is bona fide based on the petitioner’s compliance with initial evidence requirements and successful completion of background checks.” USCIS, Policy Manual, Vol. 3, Part C, Ch. 5 (available at <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-3-part-c-chapter-5>). If a U visa petition is deemed bona fide, USCIS grants the petitioner “deferred action,” along with work authorization. *Id.* “Deferred action” refers to an “exercise in administrative discretion” under which “no action will thereafter be taken to proceed” with the applicant’s removal from the United States. [*Am.-Arab Anti- Discrimination Comm.*, 525 U.S. at 484] (citation omitted). Petitioners who do not receive a bona fide determination are generally not considered for a waiting list decision. USCIS, Policy Manual, Vol. 3, Part C, Ch. 6.

De Sousa, 755 F. Supp. 3d at 1269-70.

25. The USCIS Policy Manual notes that “[t]he evaluation performed by USCIS to determine whether a petition is bona fide and whether a petitioner receives a BFD [Employment Authorization Document (“EAD”)] is a more complex evaluation than looking at the petition on its face alone.” USCIS, Policy Manual, Vol. 3, Part C, Ch. 5.

26. The USCIS Policy Manual further explains that “USCIS generally does not conduct waiting list adjudications for aliens who USCIS grants BFD EADs and deferred action to; these petitioners’ next adjudicative step is final adjudication when space is available under the statutory cap.” *Id.*

27. The regulations note, however, that “a petitioner may be removed from the waiting list, and the deferred action [...] may be terminated at the discretion of USCIS.” 8 C.F.R. §214.14(d)(3).

C. Due Process, Statutory, and Regulatory Rights

28. “Freedom from imprisonment – from government custody, detention, or other forms of physical restraint – lies at the heart of the liberty that [the Due Process] Clause [of the Fifth Amendment] protects.” *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 690 (2001).

29. Immigration detention must always “bear [...] a reasonable relation to the purpose for which the individual was committed.” *Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 527 (2003).

30. When a petitioner is not deportable insofar as a grant of deferred action bars deportation, the Due Process Clause requires that any deprivation of a petitioner’s liberty be narrowly tailored to serve a compelling government interest. *See Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292, 301-02 (1993) (finding that due process “forbids the government to infringe certain ‘fundamental’ liberty interests at all, no matter what process is provided, unless the infringement is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling state interest”); *Denmore*, 538

U.S. at 528 (applying less rigorous standard for “deportable aliens”).

31. Moreover, under the Fifth Amendment, ICE cannot deprive a petitioner of notice and an opportunity to be heard “at a meaningful time and in a meaningful manner.” *Mathews v. Elridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 333 (1976).

32. Procedural due process “imposes constraints on government decisions which deprive individuals of ‘liberty’ or ‘property’ interests within the meaning of the Due Process Clause of the Fifth or Fourteenth Amendment.” *Id.* at 332.

33. Once a petitioner has identified a protected liberty or property interest, the Court must determine whether respondents have provided constitutionally sufficient process. *See id.* at 332-33.

34. In making this determination, the Court balances (1) “the private interest that will be affected by the official action”; (2) “the risk of an erroneous deprivation of such interest through the procedures used, and the probable value, if any, of additional or substitute procedural safeguards”; and (3) “the Government’s interest, including the function involved and the fiscal and administrative burdens that the additional or substitute procedural requirement would entail.” *Id.* at 335.

35. Due process cases recognize a broad liberty interest in deportation and removal proceedings. *See Bridges v. Wixon*, 326 U.S. 135, 154 (1945) (deportation “visits a great hardship on the individual and deprives him or the right to stay and live and work in the land of freedom”).

36. Due process also protects an alien’s liberty interest in the adjudication of applications for relief and benefits under the INA. *See Arevalo v. Ashcroft*, 344 F.3d 1, 15 (1st Cir. 2003) (recognizing protected interests in the “right to seek relief” even when there is no “right to the relief itself”).

D. The APA

37. Federal agencies must comply with the APA when crafting and enforcing decisions, regulations, and legislative rules. 5 U.S.C. § 553.

38. Courts have authority to review and invalidate final agency actions that are not in accordance with the law, exceed agency authority, lack substantial evidence, or are arbitrary and capricious. 5 U.S.C. § 706.

39. Under the APA, this Honorable Court has authorization to compel agency action that has been unreasonably delayed. 5 U.S.C. § 706(1).

40. An agency must “conclude a matter presented to it [...] within a reasonable time.” 5 U.S.C. § 555(b).

41. “A person suffering legal wrong because of agency action [...] is entitled to judicial review thereof.” 5 U.S.C. § 702. Agency action includes the failure to act. *Norton v. S. Utah Wilderness Alliance*, 542 U.S. 55, 62 (2004). Courts have held that procedural violations are reviewable under the APA even before final agency action. See *McNary v. Haitian Refugee Center*, 498 U.S. 479, 491 (1991).

42. “As a general matter, two conditions must be satisfied for agency action to be ‘final’: First, the action must mark the ‘consummation’ of the agency’s decision making process . . . it must not be of a merely tentative or interlocutory nature. And second, the action must be one by which ‘rights or obligations have been determined,’ or from which ‘legal consequences will flow.’” *Bennett v. Spear*, 520 U.S. 154, 177-78 (1997).

STATEMENT OF THE FACTS

43. In 2001, the Petitioner/Plaintiff entered the United States.

44. On or about June 8, 2022, Petitioner/Plaintiff was ordered removed at the Miami Immigration Court. On October 16, 2022, the Board of Immigration Appeals

(“BIA”) dismissed his appeal.

45. On or about August 10, 2017, the Petitioner/Plaintiff filed an I-918A Petition, Supplement A, Petition for Qualifying Family Member of U-1 Recipient (Form I-918, Supplement A) with Respondent/Defendant USCIS. *See* copy of USCIS I-918A Petition Receipt Notice dated August 15, 2017, at Exhibit No. 1. The Petitioner/Plaintiff is an I-918A qualifying family member of a U-1 recipient, his daughter. The daughter filed Form I-918, Petition for U Nonimmigrant Status, to request temporary immigration benefits as she was the victim of certain qualifying criminal activity. Pursuant to USCIS regulations, if a victim of a qualifying crime is under 21 years of age on the date the petition is received by USCIS, her parent may be included as a qualifying family member. *See* 8 CFR 214.14(f)(1).

46. On August 10, 2017, Petitioner/Plaintiff filed Form I-192, Application for Advance Permission to Enter as Nonimmigrant in conjunction with his U-Visa application seeking a waiver of any inadmissibility grounds applicable. *See* Exhibit 3. Under INA §212(d)(14), U nonimmigrant applicants may apply for a waiver of any inadmissibility ground except those in INA § 212(a)(3)(E) [participants in Nazi persecutions, genocide, torture, or extrajudicial killing]. The INA authorizes USCIS to grant an inadmissibility waiver for U nonimmigrants when a waiver would be in the “public or national interest.” *Id.*

47. On June 8, 2022, Respondents/Defendants provided Petitioner/Plaintiff with a Bona Fide Determination Notice, granting him deferred action. The notice states Petitioner/Plaintiff established the eligibility requirements for U nonimmigrant status but since statutory cap has been reached for the fiscal year, Petitioner/Plaintiff’s application has shown he warrants a favorable exercise of discretion to receive employment authorization and deferred action. *See* copy of USCIS Bona Fide Determination Notice dated June 8, 2022, at Exhibit No. 2.

48. On October 12, 2023, Respondent/Defendant provided Petitioner/Plaintiff with an Employment Authorization card under the C14 category that is valid until October 11, 2027. *See* copy of Employment Authorization card at Exhibit No. 2; *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 274a.12(c)(14) (providing for work authorization document for “an alien who has been granted deferred action, an act of administrative convenience to the government that gives some cases lower priority, if the alien establishes an economic necessity for employment”).

49. The Petitioner/Plaintiff’s counsel before the agencies indicated to undersigned counsel that ICE ERO apprehended the Petitioner/Plaintiff on or about November 14, 2025, in Orlando, Florida, and has been detaining him at Baker County Detention Center since that time.

50. If ICE ERO executes a removal order against a petitioner for U-nonimmigrant status, the Petitioner/Plaintiff will need to await adjudication of the I-918A Petition from abroad and would face separation from family during this period and would need to obtain additional waivers to return to the United States when the case backlog clears. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(9)(A), (B)(i)(II).

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

COUNT I

RESPONDENTS/DEFENDANTS HAVE VIOLATED THE APA, INA, AND REGULATIONS

51. Petitioner/Plaintiff RIVERAAMADOR repeats and re-alleges paragraphs 1 through 49 as though fully set forth herein.

52. Under the APA, “final agency action for which there is no other adequate remedy in court [is] subject to judicial review.” 5 U.S.C. § 704.

53. The reviewing court “shall [...] hold unlawful and set aside agency action, findings, and conclusions found to be (A) arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or

otherwise not in accordance with law,” or “unsupported by substantial evidence.” 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A).

54. Assuming *arguendo* that the Respondents'/Defendants' basis for re-detaining the Petitioner/Plaintiff is 8 U.S.C. § 1231, the detention is unlawful.

55. 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(3) provides that an individual who is not removed within a 90- day statutory period “shall be subject to supervision,” and the 90-day period in the instant matter expired in 2013.

56. Moreover, the Respondents/Defendants have ignored the BFD finding and deferred action grant that prevents the Petitioner/Plaintiff's deportation, and this is arbitrary, capricious, and abuse of discretion, not in accordance with the law, and unsupported by substantial evidence.

COUNT II

RESPONDENTS/DEFENDANTS HAVE VIOLATED THE DUE PROCESS CLAUSE TO THE FIFTH AMENDMENT

57. Petitioner/Plaintiff RIVERA AMADOR repeats and re-alleges paragraphs 1 through 49 as though fully set forth herein.

58. The Respondents/Defendants have failed to provide the Petitioner/Plaintiff with due process pursuant to the Fifth Amendment.

59. To comport with due process requirements, detention must bear a reasonable relationship to its two regulatory purposes of ensuring the appearance of noncitizens at future hearings and to prevent danger to the community pending the completion of removal. *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 690-91.

60. The Petitioner/Plaintiff is neither a flight risk nor a danger to the community.

61. As applied to individuals like the Petitioner/Respondent with viable claims to relief like U nonimmigrant status, the Petitioner/Plaintiff's detention fails

under the *Mathews* requirement to weigh an individual's liberty interest and the risk of erroneous deprivation of the interest against the government's interest. *Id.*, 424 U.S. at 334-35.

62. Here, the Petitioner/Plaintiff's interest is substantial, as freedom from physical restraint is an interest that "lies at the heart of the liberty that the [Due Process] Clause protects." *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 690.

63. The government's interest in removing aliens is diminished when the Petitioner/Plaintiff is the beneficiary of a deferred action grant arising from a BFD determination in I-918A Petition proceedings.

64. Furthermore, the Respondents/Defendants have failed to provide notice and an opportunity to be heard that comports with due process requirements.

RELIEF REQUESTED

WHEREFORE, Petitioner/Plaintiff RIVERA AMADOR prays that this Honorable Court grant the following relief:

1. Accept jurisdiction over this action.
2. Issue a Writ of Habeas Corpus requiring the Respondents/Defendants to produce the Petitioner/Plaintiff and to show why her detention is not unlawful.
3. Grant temporary and permanent injunctive relief staying the Petitioner/Respondent's imminent removal.
4. Grant temporary and permanent injunctive relief requiring the Respondents/Defendants to release the Petitioner/Plaintiff from custody.
5. Declare that the Respondents/Defendants detention of the Petitioner/Plaintiff violates the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment, the INA, the APA, and regulations.

6. Declare that the Respondents/ Defendants deportation of the Petitioner/Plaintiff would violate the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment, the INA, the APA, and regulations.

7. Award Plaintiff RIVERAAMADOR reasonable costs and attorney fees for bringing this action.

8. Grant such further relief as Plaintiff RIVERAAMADOR may request and/or this Honorable Court deems just and proper under the circumstances.

Respectfully submitted this 25th of November 2025,

Alexandra Friz-Garcia, Esq.
Attorney for Petitioner/Plaintiff
901 Ponce De Leon Blvd, Suite 402
Miami, FL 33134
Telephone: (305) 446-1151

By: /s/ Alexandra Friz-Garcia

Alexandra Friz-Garcia, Esq.
Florida Bar No. 0111496
afriz@visadoctors.com

VERIFICATION

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2242, undersigned counsel certifies under penalty of perjury that I am submitting this verification because I am one of the Petitioner/Plaintiff's attorneys and I have discussed the facts within this Petition with the Petitioner/Plaintiff's counsel in stay of removal proceedings before Respondents/Defendants. Pursuant to these discussions, I have reviewed the foregoing petition and that, to the best of my knowledge, the facts therein are true and accurate, and the attachments to the petition are true and correct copies of the originals.

Respectfully submitted this 25th day of November 2025,

Alexandra Friz-Garcia, Esq.
Attorney for Petitioner/Plaintiff
901 Ponce De Leon Blvd, Suite 402
Miami, FL 33134

Telephone: (305) 446-1151

By: /s/ Alexandra Friz-Garcia

Alexandra Friz-Garcia, Esq.

Florida Bar No. 0111496

afriz@visadoctors.com

EXHIBIT LIST

Exhibit 1: Receipt, Form I-918A, Supplement A, Petition for Qualifying Family Member of U-1 Recipient, dated August 10, 2017.

Exhibit 2: USCIS Bona Fide Determination issued June 8, 2022; USCIS Employment Authorization Document issued October 12, 2023.

Exhibit 3: Receipt, Form I-192, Application for Advance Permission to Enter as Nonimmigrant, dated August 10, 2017