

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
AUSTIN DIVISION

Juan Alberto Barrios Morales,

Petitioner,

v.

Kristi Noem, Secretary of the U.S.
Department of Homeland Security, *et al.*,

Respondents.

Civil Action No. 1:26-cv-00290-RP

RESPONSE TO PETITION

Federal Respondents¹ provide the following response to Petitioner's habeas petition. See ECF Nos. 1, 8. Any allegations that are not specifically admitted herein are denied. Petitioner is not entitled to the relief sought, including attorney's fees under the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA).² There is no dispute that Petitioner is subject to mandatory detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2). *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, 166 F.4th 494, 498 (5th Cir. Feb. 6, 2026). The *Buenrostro-Mendez* decision is binding precedent and requires that the Court deny this habeas petition as it relates to the statutory authority to detain Petitioner during his removal proceedings.³

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

² *Barco v. Witte*, 65 F.4th 782 (5th Cir. 2023).

³ The *Buenrostro-Mendez* 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.").

Respondents aver that *Buenrostro-Mendez* forecloses all Petitioner's claims in his petition, but to the extent the Court analyzes Petitioner's as-applied due process claim on the merits, Petitioner has not made the required showing. The petition should be denied in its entirety without a hearing.

BACKGROUND

Petitioner is a native and citizen of Guatemala. Exhibit (Exh) A (Notice to Appear). On or about 2005, Petitioner entered the United States without admission or parole after inspection. *Id.*; see also ECF No. 1 ¶ 3. Petitioner was detained by immigration authorities for the first time on or about September 30, 2025, and was issued a Notice to Appear (NTA) on October 4, 2025. Exh A; see also ECF No. 1 ¶¶ 4, 6. Also on October 4, 2025, an arrest warrant was issued for Petitioner, finding that there was probable cause to believe that Petitioner was removable from the United States. Exh B (Arrest Warrant). On January 9, 2026, an immigration judge (IJ) ordered Petitioner's removal. See Executive Office of Immigration Review Automated Case Information System (last accessed on March 10, 2026) (<https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/en/caseInformation>). On February 4, 2026, Petitioner appealed the removal order, and his appeal is currently pending. *Id.* Petitioner is currently detained at the T. Don Hutto Detention Center in Taylor, Texas. ECF No. 1 ¶ 10.

DUE PROCESS CLAIMS

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-Mendez*, 166 F.4th at 508. 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).

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).⁴ By contrast, a 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).

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 §1225(b)(2)(A) is a constitutionally insufficient basis on which to justify the deprivation of liberty. *See* ECF No. 8 pg 3. Petitioner's due process argument is one that is substantive, not procedural, in nature. Petitioner has requested that this Court find that due process requires additional procedures in the form of a bond hearing

⁴ Respondents do not concede that *Mathews* provides the appropriate framework in this case.

(“... his continued detention without consideration for release violates his constitutional rights under the Fifth Amendment” *Id.*). But a bond hearing is merely the vehicle for making a substantive determination about flight risk or dangerousness. Those factors are irrelevant under this statute. Because §1225(b)(2)(A) requires mandatory detention and does not require such determinations, Petitioner’s claim is, in reality, a substantive-due-process challenge, not a procedural one. Congress imposed mandatory detention on all applicants for admission, regardless of flight risk or danger. 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.

Plaintiffs 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. The Fifth Circuit applied that rule in a similar context in *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) 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 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* (and not even lawfully *paroled*) 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 thus was presumably forming connections to the United States. *Id.* at 229. Still, because she 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. *Buenrostro-Mendez*, 166 F.4th at 504. 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 and successfully evading enforcement for some length of time—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 right to which he is entitled, so 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 right cannot possibly be “objectively, deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and tradition.” *Muñoz*, 602 U.S. at 910 (quoting *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 720-21 (1997)). 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 as long as 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 chance 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.” 116 F.4th at 508. (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 as charged on the NTA. Moreover, Petitioner makes no showing that his removal proceedings and corresponding detention during those proceedings are unconstitutional as applied to him. Petitioner makes no allegations that he is being deprived of the right to counsel in removal proceedings. Indeed, the NTA notified him of the allegations and charge against him, and Petitioner is seeking judicial review 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).

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-Mendez*, 116 F.4th at 498. Petitioner fails to show that 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.

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Respectfully submitted,

Justin R. Simmons
United States Attorney

By: /s/ Gerald R. Krimbill
Gerald R. Krimbill
Assistant United States Attorney
Minnesota Bar No. 0220437
601 N.W. Loop 410, Suite 600
San Antonio, Texas 78216
(210) 384-7300 (phone)
(210) 384-7312 (fax)
jerry.krimbill@usdoj.gov

Attorneys for Federal Respondents