UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

Nilson MOLINA LARA

Petitioner,

v.

Kenneth GENALO, in his official capacity as Field Office Director of New York, Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Kristi NOEM in her official capacity as Secretary of Homeland Security; Pam BONDI, in her official capacity as Attorney General.

Respondents.

Case No.

PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS

INTRODUCTION

Petitioner Nilson Josue Molina Lara is a senior at Brentwood High School detained today by Respondents on his way to school, despite his prior release from immigration custody as an unaccompanied minor; his pending removal proceedings, in which he is represented by counsel; and his ongoing efforts to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. His aunt, who is his caretaker in the absence of either of his parents, received a notification from his school this morning when he did not arrive and was alarmed when she could not reach him by phone. It was not until early this afternoon, hours later, that he called to tell her he was detained by immigration authoities in or en route to Central Islip. His detention today in the inhumane holding cells in the Central Islip office, when he should have been in school, is egregious and unjustified. Rather than an individualized stop, his stop appears to be a part of a campaign of random, often race-based stops and detentions across New York that result in the jailing of individuals without any lawful reason, including individuals previously deeemed to pose neither danger nor flight risk and released.

Respondents now purport to hold Nilson in mandatory detention, without recourse to bond, despite his years of residence in the U.S.; his unaccompanied-minor status; and his ongoing removal proceedings.

Because Nilson's detention is unlawful, he asks this Court to grant his petition and order his immediate release.

PARTIES

1. Petitioner Nilson Josue Molina Lara is a resident of Brentwood, New York. He was detained by Respondents on March 11, 2026 and remains in their custody.

2. Kenneth Genalo is named in his official capacity as the Field Office Director of the New York Field Office for Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") within the United States Department of Homeland Security. The ICE New York Field Office is respomsible for detentions in the greater New York City area, including Nassau County. In this capacity, Mr. Francis is also responsible for the administration of immigration laws and the execution of detention and removal determinations and is a legal custodian of Petitioner. Respondent Francis's address is New York ICE Field Office Director, 26 Federal Plaza, 7th Floor, New York, New York 10278.

3. Respondent Kristi Noem is named in her official capacity as the Secretary of Homeland Security in the United States Department of Homeland Security. In this capacity, she is responsible for the administration of the immigration laws pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1103(a) (2007); routinely transacts business in the Eastern District of New York; is legally responsible for pursuing any effort to remove the Petitioner; and as such is a legal custodian of the Petitioner. Respondent Noem's address is U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE, Washington, District of Columbia 20528.

4. Respondent Pam Bondi is named in her official capacity as the Attorney General of the United States. In this capacity, she is responsible for the administration of the immigration laws as exercised by the Executive Office for Immigration Review ("EOIR"), pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1103(g). She routinely transacts business in the Eastern District of New York and is legally responsible for administering Petitioner's removal and custody proceedings and for the standards used in those proceedings. As such, she is the custodian of Petitioner. Respondent Bondi's office is located at the United States Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20530.

JURISDICTION

5. The federal district courts have jurisdiction to hear habeas corpus claims by non-citizens challenging the lawfulness or constitutionality of their detention by ICE. *See, e.g., Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 516-17 (2003); *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 687 (2001). Petitioner was detained by Respondents on June 23, 2025.

6. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this Petition pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241 (habeas); 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (federal question); and Article I, § 9, cl. 2 of the United States Constitution. This Court has authority to grant declaratory and injunctive relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201, 2202. The Court has additional remedial authority under the All Writs Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1651 and the Declaratory Judgment Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2201.

VENUE

7. Venue is appropriate in this district as he is currently detained by Respondents in East Meadow, New York.

SPECIFIC FACTS ABOUT PETITIONER

8. Petitioner Nilson Josue Molina Lara ("Nilson") is an 18-year-old resident of Brentwood, New York. He is in his last year of high school at Brentwood High School.

9. Nilson was abandoned by his mother at a young age and his father later passed away. He came to the U.S. as an accompanied minor on or about November 3, 2022. He was placed into the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement and ultimately released to his aunt, with whom he has resided since that time.

10. In a notice to appear dated November 4, 2022, Nilson was charged with removability from the U.S. for being present without admission. The Notice to Appear was not filed with the immigration court so as to commence removal proceedings commenced in June 2025. Nilson attended a master calendar hearing at the Varick Immigration Court in July 2025 and was set for a next hearing in September 2026.

11. Nilson is represented pro bono by a nonprofit legal service provider, Make the Road New York, in his removal proceeding. He is also in the process of seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status based on abandonment and neglect by his mother and the death of his father. He is scheduled for a hearing next month in Suffolk Family Court, also represented by Make the Road New York.

12. On information and belief, Nilson does not have a criminal history in any country.

13. On March 11, Nilson was detained by immigration agents in unmarked vehicles as he walked to school around 8:15 a.m. In a brief call today, he told his aunt that he feared for his safety when agents or officers approached him.

14. The ICE locator does not yet show that Nilson is in custody. His aunt received a message from his school earlier today informing her that he was absent; she tried to call him but he did not

answer. He called her around 1:30 p.m. and told her he had been detained by immigration agents and he was in or on his way to Central Islip.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIL IMMIGRATION DETENTION

15. Congress has authorized civil detention of noncitizens in removal proceedings for specific, non-punitive purposes. *See Jennings v. Rodriguez*, 138 S.Ct. 830, 833 (2018); *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 690 (2001). For individuals who are "arriving" in the U.S. or who are subject to expedited removal because they have been present under two years and meet certain other requirements, mandatory detention is authorized by 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b). For individuals who are in removal proceedings following entry without inspection and who are not subject to mandatory detention based on criminal history, detention is normally authorized by 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a). That statute and "its implementing regulations require ICE officials to make an individualized custody determination." *Velesaca v. Decker*, 458 F. Supp. 3d 224, 241 (S.D.N.Y. 2020).

16. Individuals with a final order of removal may be subject to mandatory or discretionary detention pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a).

17. The Office of Refugee Resettlement ("ORR"), a division of the Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS"), is the agency responsible for managing the care and placement of unaccompanied alien children ("children"). 6 U.S.C. §§ 279(a), (b)(1)(A), (b)(1)(C). Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act ("TVPRA"), ORR is charged by statute with acting in the best interest of the children and releasing them to adult caregivers. 8 U.S.C. § 1232(c). Pursuant to the TVPRA, ORR must ensure that children are "promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child." 8 U.S.C. § 1232(c)(2)(A)

18. Beginning in May 2025, the Board of Immigration Appeals and the Department of Justice have promulgated a series of decisions and policies to attempt to reclassify individuals who entered

the country without inspect as subject to mandatory detention pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b). *See Matter of Q. Li*, 29 I. & N. Dec. 66, 69 (BIA 2025); *Matter of Yajure Furtado,* 29 I&N Dec. 216 (BIA 2025). As a result, individuals like Petitioner who entered the U.S. without inspection are now not eligible for bond absent a federal-court order in a habeas case.

19. Respondents' position on their own detention authority contradicts decades of settled precedent, which holds that individuals who entered the U.S. without inspection are governed by 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a). Regulations promulgated nearly thirty years ago provide that "[d]espite being applicants for admission, [noncitizens] who are present without having been admitted or paroled (formerly referred to as [noncitizens] who entered without inspection) will be eligible for bond and bond redetermination" under Section 1226. 62 Fed. Reg. 10312, 10323 (Mar. 6, 1997). Until recently, Respondents consistently adhered to this interpretation. *See, e.g., Matter of Garcia-Garcia*, 25 I&N. Dec. 93 (BIA 2009); *Matter of D-J-*, 23 I&N. Dec. 572 (A.G. 2003); *see also* Transcript of Oral Argument at 44:24–45:2, *Biden v. Texas*, 597 U.S. 785 (2022) (No. 21-954) ([Solicitor General]: "DHS's long-standing interpretation has been that 1226(a) applies to those who have crossed the border between ports of entry and are shortly thereafter apprehended.").

20. Since this shift, "hundreds of district court decisions have rejected Respondents' expansive interpretation of Section 1225." *Molina v. DelLeon,* No. 25-CV-06526 (JMA), 2025 WL 3718728, at *3 (E.D.N.Y. Dec. 23, 2025) (collecting cases); *Rodriguez v. Bostock*, No. 3:25-CV-05240-TMC, 2025 WL 2782499, at *1 (W.D. Wash. Sept. 30, 2025) ("Every district court to address this question has concluded that the government's position belies the statutory text of the INA, canons of statutory interpretation, legislative history, and longstanding agency practice.").

21. In November, a district court in California also held in a series of decisions that DHS's position on bond eligibility is unlawful with respect to "all noncitizens in the United States without

lawful status who (1) have entered or will enter the United States without inspection; (2) were not or will not be apprehended upon arrival; and (3) are not or will not be subject to detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c), § 1225(b)(1), or § 1231 at the time the Department of Homeland Security makes an initial custody determination." *Maldonado Bautista v. Santacruz*, No. 5:25-CV-01873-SSS-BFM, --- F. Supp. 3d ----, 2025 WL 3288403, at *1 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 25, 2025); *see also Maldonado Bautista v. Santacruz*, No. 5:25-CV-01873-SSS-BFM, 2025 WL 3713987, at *1, *32 (C.D. Cal. Dec. 18, 2025), *judgment entered sub nom. Maldonado Bautista v. Noem*, No. 5:25-CV-01873-SSS-BFM, 2025 WL 3678485 (C.D. Cal. Dec. 18, 2025). That judgement should be binding on Respondents nationwide, but instead Respondents have directed immigration judges to ignore the decision. On February 18, the court granted plaintiffs' motion to enforce the judgment and excoriated the government for "far cross[ing] the boundaries of constitutional conduct." *Lazaro Maldonado Bautista et al. v. Ernesto Santacruz Jr et al.*, 5:25-cv-01873-SSS-BFM at *10 (C.D. Cal. February 18, 2026).

22. A person's liberty cannot be infringed upon without "adequate procedural protections." *Zadvydas*, 533 U.S. at 690-91. The Second Circuit has held that the *Matthews v. Eldridge* balancing test is applicable to determine the adequacy of process in the context of civil immigration confinement. *Velasco Lopez*, 978 F.3d at 851 (citing *Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319 (1976)). This test requires process sufficient to mitigate the risk of erroneous deprivation of a liberty interest.

23. Numerous courts in this district and others across the country have held that these detentions violate not only the Immigration and Nationality Act but also the due-process clause. *See Padilla Molina v. Deleon*, No. 25-CV-06526, 2025 WL 3718728, at *5 (E.D.N.Y. Dec. 23, 2025); *Hyppolite v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-4304, 2025 WL 2829511 (E.D.N.Y. Oct. 6, 2025); *Artiga v.*

Genalo, No. 25-cv-5208, 2025 WL 2829434 (E.D.N.Y. Oct. 5, 2025); *J.U. v. Maldonado*, No. 25-cv-04836, 2025 WL 2772765 (E.D.N.Y. Sept. 29, 2025); *Guerrero v. Noem*, No. 25-cv-5881, 2025 WL 3214787 (E.D.N.Y. Nov. 18, 2025)); *Lopez Benitez v. Francis*, 795 F. Supp. 3d 475, (S.D.N.Y. August 13, 2025); *Cuy Comes v. DeLeon*, No. 25 CIV. 9283 (AT), 2025 WL 3206491, at *5 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 14, 2025); *Valdez v. Joyce*, No. 25 CIV. 4627 (GBD), 2025 WL 1707737 at *4 (S.D.N.Y. June 18, 2025).

24. Finally, ICE officers' authority to conduct warrantless arrests is prescribed in 8 U.S.C. 1357(a)(2). That statute requires that officers have "reason to believe" a person is in the U.S. in violation of laws *and* "is likely to escape before a warrant can be obtained for his arrest." That assessment must be individualized. In order to comport with the Fourth Amendment, this is tantamount to a probable-cause standard.

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

COUNT ONE
VIOLATION OF THE DUE PROCESS CLAUSE OF THE FIFTH AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

25. Petitioner repeats and re-alleges the allegations contained in all preceding paragraphs of this Petition as if fully set forth herein.

26. Petitioner's detention violates both the substantive and procedural components of the Due Process Clause. The Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment forbids the government from depriving any person of liberty without due process of law. U.S. Const. amend. V. *See generally Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292 (1993); *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678 (2001); *Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510 (2003).

27. Because "[i]n this country liberty is the norm and detention 'is the carefully limited exception,'" *Velasco Lopez v. Decker*, 978 F.3d 842, 851 (2d Cir. 2020) (*quoting United States v.*

Salerno, 481 U.S. 739, 755 (1987)), a reasoned, individualized determination is essential to ensure that detention is not an unnecessary—and thus erroneous—deprivation. Yet Respondents now contend that Petitioner is ineligible for bond under *Matter of Yajure Furtado*, 29 I&N Dec. 216 (BIA 2025). Petitioner's mandatory detention, following a summary apprehension that failed to consider his individualized circumstances or his prior release, violates his right to due process.

28. Petitioner was not accorded sufficient process prior to his sudden re-detention by ICE. On information and belief, he received neither notice nor an opportunity to be heard as to whether detention was warranted, particularly in light of Respondents' prior decision to release him. *See Padilla Molina*, 2025 WL 3718728, at *5; *see also Cuy Comes*, 2025 WL 3206491, at *5 (ordering immediate release where "ICE summarily detained Cuy Comes without making an individualized determination as to his risk of flight or his danger to the community, let alone affording him notice or opportunity to be heard"). Respondents already determined he posed neither a danger nor a flight risk in releasing him from custody and has no basis to revisit that determination.

29. Petitioner's detention also violates his right to substantive due process. Because he poses neither a danger nor a flight risk, his detention serves no lawful purpose. The detention of a high-school student on his way to school, particularly one who is in ongoing proceedings and represented by counsel, also shocks the conscience. *See Martinez v. McAleenan*, 385 F. Supp. 3d 349, 356 (S.D.N.Y. 2019) ("prevents the government from engaging in conduct that 'shocks the conscience") (quoting *Rochin v. California*, 342 U.S. 165, 172, 72 S.Ct. 205, 209, 96 L.Ed. 183 (1952)).

30. Respondents' actions violate Petitioner's right to due process.

COUNT TWO

VIOLATION OF THE TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

31. Petitioner repeats and re-alleges the allegations contained in all preceding paragraphs of this Petition as if fully set forth herein.

32. The TVPRA governs the detention of unaccompanied minors. *See generally* 8 U.S.C. § 1232; *see also Lopez v. Sessions*, No. 18-CV-4189 (RWS), 2018 WL 2932726, at *5 (S.D.N.Y. June 12, 2018) (discussing Section 1232); *see also R.A.R.R. v. Almodovar,* No. 25-CV-6597 (PKC), 2026 WL 323040, at *5-6 (E.D.N.Y. Feb. 6, 2026) (discussing legal framework around Section 1232). It provides, in relevant part, that "the care and custody of all unaccompanied alien children, including responsibility for their detention, where appropriate, shall be the responsibility of the Secretary of [HHS]," 8 U.S.C. § 1232(b)(1); that "an unaccompanied alien child in the custody of the Secretary of [HHS] shall be promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child," taking into consideration "danger to self, danger to the community, and risk of flight," id. § 1232(c)(2)(A); and that "if a minor described in subparagraph (A) reaches 18 years of age and is transferred to the custody of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary shall consider placement in the least restrictive setting available after taking into account the alien's danger to self, danger to the community, and risk of flight," id. § 1232(c)(2)(B).

33. Respondents violated the TVPRA by re-detaining Petitioner even though he falls squarely within the protections afforded by the TVPRA. At the time of his entry into the United States, Petitioner was designated an "unaccompanied minor." As a result, he was placed in the legal custody of ORR and thereafter placed in the care of his aunt pursuant to the TVPRA. Nonetheless, Respondents re-detained Petitioner despite identifying no change in his circumstances and without considering whether doing so was "the least restrictive setting available." *See R.A.R.R.*, 2026 WL 323040, at *7.

COUNT THREE
VIOLATION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE ACT

34. Petitioner repeats and re-alleges the allegations contained in all preceding paragraphs of this Petition as if fully set forth herein.

35. The Administrative Procedure Act prohibits agency action which is arbitrary and capricious; contrary to constitutional right; not authorized by statute; or taken "without observance of procedure required by law." 5 U.S.C. § 706(2).

36. An action is an abuse of discretion if the agency "entirely failed to consider an important aspect of the problem, offered an explanation for its decision that runs counter to the evidence before the agency, or is so implausible that it could not be ascribed to a difference in view or the product of agency expertise." *Nat'l Ass'n of Home Builders v. Defs. of Wildlife*, 551 U.S. 644, 658 (2007) (*quoting Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Ass'n of U.S., Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 463 U.S. 29, 43 (1983)).

37. Respondents' current construction of its detention authority, including the treatment of Petitioner as subject to mandatory detention, violates the Immigration and Nationality Act and therefore the Administrative Procedure Act. Respondents' use of its detention authority to authorize Nilson's re-detention without any change in circumstances is similarly unlawful.

COUNT FOUR
VIOLATION OF THE FOURTH AMENDMENT
AND 8 U.S.C. § 1357

38. Petitioner repeats and re-alleges the allegations contained in all preceding paragraphs of this Petition as if fully set forth herein.

39. "The Fourth Amendment applies to all seizures of the person." *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*, 422 U.S. 873, 878 (1975). Except at the border and its functional equivalents, the Fourth

Amendment prohibits Respondents from conducting a detentive stop to question a person without reasonable suspicion that a person is a noncitizen unlawfully in the United States. *Id.* at 884. The Government bears the burden of providing "specific and articulable facts" to support reasonable suspicion. *See Terry v. Ohio*, 392 U.S. 1, 21 (1968). The race of an individual cannot itself create reasonable suspicion, even for a temporary stop. *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*, 422 U.S. 873, 887 (1975); *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo*, No. 25A169, --- S.Ct. ----, 2025 WL 2585637, at *3 (Sep. 8, 2025) (Kavanaugh, J., concurring). Officers lacked reasonable suspicion to perform a detentive stop of Petitioner.

40. A search or seizure requires probable cause to believe a noncitizen "is in the United States in violation of any such law or regulation and is likely to escape before a warrant can be obtained." 8 U.S.C. § 1357 (a)(2). "Though 8 U.S.C. § 1357(a)(2) uses the phrase 'reason to believe; as the standard for executing warrantless civil immigration arrests, 'aliens in this country are sheltered by the Fourth Amendment in common with citizens,' and therefore, to avoid running afoul of the Fourth Amendment, this statutory phrase is 'considered the equivalent of probable cause.'" *Escobar Molina*, 2025 WL 3465518, at *13 (quoting *Au Yi Lau v. U.S. Immigr. & Naturalization Serv.*, 445 F.2d 217, 222-23 (D.C. Cir. 1971)); *see also United States v. Rodriguez*, 532 F.2d 834, 838 (2d Cir. 1976) (recognizing that arrests under 8 U.S.C. § 1357(a)(2) require probable cause); *English v. Sava*, 571 F. Supp. 1029, 1034 (S.D.N.Y. 1983) (construing 8 U.S.C. § 1357(a)(2) to require probable cause). Officers lacked probable cause to seize Petitioner.

41. Respondents' actions violated Petitioner's rights under the Fourth Amendment and 8 U.S.C. § 1357.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Petitioners respectfully requests that this Court:

1. Assume jurisdiction over this matter;
2. Enjoin Petitioner's removal from the United States and transfer from the Southern District of New York, Eastern District of New York, or District of New Jersey pending adjudication of the instant petition;
3. Order Respondents to show cause why the writ should not be granted within three days, and set a hearing on this Petition within five days of the return, as required by 28 U.S.C. § 2243;
4. Declare that Petitioner's detention violates the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment and the Administrative Procedure Act;
5. Grant a writ of habeas corpus ordering Respondents to immediately release Petitioner without GPS monitoring;
6. Award reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to the Equal Access to Justice Act, 5 U.S.C. § 504 and 28 U.S.C. § 2412; and
7. Grant such further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

Dated: March 11, 2026

/s/ Paige Austin
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VERIFICATION BY SOMEONE ACTING ON THE PETITIONER'S BEHALF PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. § 2241

I am submitting this verification on behalf of Petitioner because I am an attorney for Petitioner. I have discussed the events described in this Petitioner with Petitioner's family and reviewed internal documents pertaining to Petitioner's case. On the basis of that discussion and review, I hereby verify that the statements made in the attached Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus are true and correct to the best of my knowledge. This verification is being made by counsel rather than by Petitioners due to counsel's inability to meet with either Petitioner in person to review it in a timely fashion.

Dated: March 11, 2026
Queens, New York

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Paige Austin
Paige Austin

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that on March 11, 2026, I electronically filed the attached the foregoing Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus with the Clerk of the Court for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York using the CM/ECF system. Service will therefore be effected by the CM/ECF system.

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