

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
KENTUCKY, NORTHERN DIVISION AT COVINGTON

Susu Zheng v. James A. Daley, et al.

Civil Action No. 26-12-DLB · No. Civil Action No. 26-12-DLB · Decided February 3, 2026

SUMMARY

The court grants Susu Zheng’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241. It holds that the mandatory detention provision in 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A) does not apply to a noncitizen who has been present in the United States for more than two years and is not actively seeking admission. The court concludes that Zheng is instead detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) and is entitled to request a bond hearing before an immigration judge.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky, Northern Division at Covington
WRITING FOR THE COURT	David L. Bunning
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky, Northern Division at Covington
DECIDED	February 3, 2026
DOCKET	Civil Action No. 26-12-DLB
DISPOSITION	writ_granted
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought habeas relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 from immigration detention, requesting immediate release or an individualized bond hearing. The district court granted the petition.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo statutory interpretation; due-process analysis under the three- factor balancing test of Mathews v. Eldridge.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Susu Zheng v. Samuel Olson, James A. Daley

TOPICS

- immigration detention
- removal proceedings
- statutory interpretation
- procedural due process
- immigration

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Zheng's detention was governed by the mandatory-detention provision in 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2) (A) or the discretionary detention provision in 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a).
2. Whether detention without an individualized bond hearing violated Zheng's due-process rights under the Fifth Amendment.

HOLDINGS

1. Section 1225(b)(2)(A) does not apply to Zheng because, although she qualifies as an applicant for admission under § 1225(a)(1), she was neither an arriving alien nor actively seeking admission after residing in the United States for more than two years.
2. Zheng's detention is governed by 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a), which entitles her to request an individualized bond hearing before an immigration judge.
3. Zheng's detention without an individualized custody determination or bond hearing violated the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Because Zheng is neither an “arriving alien” nor “seeking admission” into the United States, the mandatory detention provisions contained § 1225(b)(2) do not apply to her.” (Analysis § III.B)

“Therefore, the Court finds that Zheng is not subject to § 1225(b)(2)(A). Rather, the facts of the case make clear that her detention is governed by § 1226(a).” (Analysis § III.B)

“As other courts have concluded, Zheng’s detention without a bond hearing violates the due process rights afforded to her by the Fifth Amendment and she is therefore entitled to an individualized custody determination.” (Analysis § III.C)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Susu Zheng, a native and citizen of China, entered the United States without inspection in November 2023 and remained in the country for more than two years. DHS issued her a Notice to Appear identifying her as present in the United States without admission or parole, rather than as an arriving alien. ICE detained her on October 27, 2025, while she had pending removal proceedings and an asylum application, and held her at the Campbell County Detention Center without a bond hearing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Zheng was detained by ICE on October 27, 2025, while removal proceedings were pending. She filed a § 2241 petition on January 14, 2026. After responses and a reply, the district court granted habeas relief and ordered immediate release or a bond hearing within seven days.

DISPOSITION

writ_granted

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Respondents must immediately release Zheng or, alternatively, provide her with a bond hearing under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) within seven days of the order. Respondents must file a status report by February 17, 2026, certifying compliance and reporting the hearing's outcome and any reasons for denial of bond.

CASES CITED

- *Munaf v. Geren*, 553 U.S. 674, 693 (2008)
- *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507, 525, 531 (2004)
- *Rasul v. Bush*, 542 U.S. 466, 483 (2004)
- *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369, 386, 400, 412-13 (2024)
- *Walters v. Metro Educational Enterprises, Inc.*, 519 U.S. 202, 207 (1997)
- *Roberts v. Sea-Land Services, Inc.*, 566 U.S. 93, 101 (2012)
- *Dubin v. United States*, 599 U.S. 110, 120-21 (2023)
- *Castañon-Nava v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, 161 F.4th 1048, 1061-62 (7th Cir. 2025)
- *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, 583 U.S. 281, 288-89, 298, 303 (2018)
- *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 693 (2001)
- *Leng May Ma v. Barber*, 357 U.S. 185, 187 (1958)
- *Sanchez v. Mayorkas*, 593 U.S. 409, 415 (2021)
- *Star Athletica, LLC v. Varsity Brands, Inc.*, 580 U.S. 405, 414 (2017)
- *Gustafson v. Alloyed Co., Inc.*, 513 U.S. 561, 585 (1995) (Thomas, J., dissenting)
- *Dep't of Homeland Sec. v. Regents of the Univ. of Cal.*, 591 U.S. 1, 22 (2020)
- *Stone v. I.N.S.*, 514 U.S. 386, 397 (1995)
- *Marx v. General Revenue Corp.*, 568 U.S. 371, 386 (2013)
- *Abramski v. United States*, 573 U.S. 169, 202-03 (2014) (Scalia, J., dissenting)
- *Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 321 (1976)
- *Foucha v. Louisiana*, 504 U.S. 71, 80 (1992)
- *A.A.R.P. v. Trump*, 605 U.S. 91, 94 (2025)

OPINION

Zheng

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

EASTERN DISTRICT OF KENTUCKY

NORTHERN DIVISION

AT COVINGTON

CIVIL ACTION NO. 26-12-DLB

SUSU ZHENG PETITIONER

v. MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER

JAMES A. DALEY, et al. RESPONDENTS * * * * *

I. INTRODUCTION

This matter is before the Court on Petitioner Susu Zheng’s Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Doc. # 1). Respondents¹ having filed their Responses (Docs. # 5 and 6), and Petitioner having filed a Reply (Doc. # 6), this matter is now ripe for review. For the following reasons, the Court will grant the Petition.

II. FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

Zheng is a native and citizen of China who entered the United States without inspection in November 2023. (Doc. # 1 ¶ 2). She has been present in the United States since her entry more than two years ago. (Id. ¶ 18). On November 8, 2023, she was served with a Notice to Appear before an Immigration Judge (“IJ”), notifying her that she was an “alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or paroled.” (Doc. # 4-1). 1 Petitioner files this action against Samuel Olson, Field Office Director of Enforcement and Removal Operations (“ERO”), Chicago Field Office, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”). Petitioner additionally filed this action against James A. Daley, Jailer, Campbell County Detention Center. Respondent Daley filed his Response, arguing that he is not Petitioner’s legal or immediate custodian. (Doc. # 5). Petitioner agrees, and therefore, the Court will address only the Response filed by the other listed Respondent. Zheng’s Petition stems from her present detention by ICE. (Id. ¶¶ 4–5). She was detained by ICE on October 27, 2025 and is currently being detained at Campbell County Detention Center in Newport, Kentucky. (Id. ¶ 4). Zheng has a hearing before an IJ in Indianapolis on February 9, 2026. (Id. ¶ 21; see also Doc. # 4 at 2). She further indicated she has an application for asylum before an Immigration Court. (Id. ¶ 6). On January 14, 2026, Zheng filed the instant Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241. (Id. ¶ 10). In her Petition, Zheng argues she is wrongfully detained at Campbell County Detention Center and requests that the Court order her immediate release or, alternatively, a bond hearing before an IJ. (Id. ¶ 7). On January 15, 2026, the Court directed Respondents to respond to the Petition. (Doc. # 3). Respondents having filed their Responses (Docs. # 4 and 5), and Zheng having filed her Reply (Doc. # 6), this matter is now ripe for the Court’s review.

III. ANALYSIS

Zheng’s Petition alleges that her detention violates the Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”) and deprives her of her right to due process under the Fifth Amendment. (Doc. # 1 ¶¶ 5, 56). Specifically, she claims that Respondents have erroneously detained her pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2), which mandates detention during the pendency of removal proceedings. (Id. ¶ 101). Instead, Zheng contends that she is subject to the discretionary detention provisions of 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) and, as a result, she is eligible for release on bond. (Id. at 60). A. Relevant Framework At

its core, habeas provides “a remedy for unlawful executive detention” *Munaf v. Geren*, 553 U.S. 674, 693 (2008), available to “every individual detained within the United States.” *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507, 525 (2004). The “typical remedy for such detention is, of course, release.” *Munaf*, 553 U.S. at 693. Such relief “may be granted by the . . . district courts . . . within their respective jurisdictions.” 28 U.S.C. § 2241(a). The Supreme Court has recognized that habeas relief extends to noncitizens. See *Rasul v. Bush*, 542 U.S. 466, 483 (2004) (“[Alien] Petitioners contend that they are being held in federal custody in violation of the laws of the United States . . . Section 2241, by its terms, requires nothing more.”). Enacted in 1952, the INA consolidated previous immigration and nationality laws and now contains “many of the most important provisions of immigration law.” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration and Nationality Act (July 10, 2019), <https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation/immigration-and-nationality-act#:~:text=The%20Immigration%20and%20Nationality%20Act,the%20U.S.%20House%20of%20Representatives>. Relevant to Zheng’s Petition, Congress has established two statutes, codified in Title 8, which govern detention of noncitizens pending removal proceedings—8 U.S.C. §§ 1225 and 1226. The first statute, 8 U.S.C. § 1225 is titled “Inspection by immigration officers; expedited removal of inadmissible arriving aliens; referral for hearing.” It states, in pertinent part: (b) Inspection of applicants for admission

(2) Inspection of other aliens

(A) In general Subject to subparagraphs (B) and (C), in the case of an alien who is an applicant for admission, if the examining immigration officer determines that an alien seeking admission is not clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to be admitted, the alien shall be detained for a proceeding under section 1229(a) of this title. 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). Important to note, for purposes of this provision, “an alien who is an applicant for admission” is defined as an “alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or who arrives in the United States.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1). The second provision at issue, 8 U.S.C. § 1226, is titled “Apprehension and detention of aliens” and reads: (a) Arrest, detention, and release On a warrant issued by the Attorney General, an alien may be arrested and detained pending a decision on whether the alien is to be removed from the United States. Except as provided in subsection (c) and pending such decision, the Attorney General—

(1) May continue to detain the arrested alien; and

(2) May release the alien on—

(A) Bond of at least \$1,500 with security approved by, and containing conditions prescribed by, the Attorney General 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a). Section 1226(c) of the INA was amended by Congress in January 2025 with the enactment of the Laken Riley Act, which added a new subsection under Section 1226(c), requiring mandatory detention in certain circumstances. Pub. L. No. 119-1, § 2, 139 Stat. 3, 3 (2025). The amendment added a two-step process, in which the Attorney General must detain a noncitizen if

(1) they are inadmissible because they are in the United States without

being admitted or paroled, obtained documents or admission through misrepresentation or fraud, or lacks valid documentation and

(2) is charged with, is arrested for, is convicted of, admits having committed, or admits committing acts which constitute the essential elements of any burglary, theft, larceny, shoplifting, or assault of a law enforcement officer offense, or any crime that results in death or serious bodily injury to another person. *Barrera v. Tindall*, No. 3:25-cv-541-RGJ, 2025 WL 2690565, at *3 (W.D. Ky. Sep. 19, 2025) (quoting U.S.C. §§ 1226(c)(1)(E)(i)-(ii)). The distinction between 8 U.S.C. §§ 1225 and 1226 lies at the heart of Zheng’s Petition. (See Doc. # 1 at ¶ 56; Doc. # 4 at 6–7). Pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a), noncitizens who are arrested and detained have the right to request a bond hearing before an IJ. Conversely, under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A), all aliens deemed to be applicants for admission must be detained. As noted *supra*, Zheng, a noncitizen who has lived in the United States for more than two years, has been detained by ICE and is being held at the Campbell County Detention Center. The question, then, is whether Zheng must be detained without a hearing under § 1225(b)(2), or whether she has the right to request a bond hearing pursuant to § 1226.2 B. Statutory Interpretation The parties agree on the basic facts of this case. Rather, the central disagreement concerns which statutory provision applies to Zheng. Thus, the issue before the Court is one of statutory interpretation. In interpreting statutes, district courts must “use every tool at their disposal to determine the best reading of the statute.” *Loper Bright Enter. v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369, 400 (2024). Statutes must be given their “ordinary, 2 The Court notes that the matter before this Court is not whether the executive branch has the authority to direct ICE/DHS to detain and deport noncitizens. The question before the Court is a narrower one, to wit, whether those noncitizens—specifically Petitioner Zheng—are entitled to request a bond hearing before an IJ prior to their removal hearing pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) or must be mandatorily detained pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2)(A). contemporary, common meaning” *Walters v. Metro Edu. Enters., Inc.*, 519 U.S. 202, 207

(1997), while also being read “in their context and with a view to their place in the overall statutory scheme.” *Roberts v. Sea-Land Servs., Inc.*, 566 U.S. 93, 101 (2012). The Court first turns to the plain language of the statute. The Court begins by looking at the first words one may read—the title. A “[c]ourt gives each and every word meaning, and this includes the title.” *Barrera*, 2025 WL 2690565, at *4. While section headings are not dispositive, “they are instructive and provide the Court with the necessary assurance that it is at least applying the right part of the statute in a given circumstance.” *Lopez-Campos v. Raycraft*, No. 2:25-cv-12486, 2025 WL 2496379, at *8 (E.D. Mich. Aug. 29, 2025); see also *Dubin v. United States*, 599 U.S. 110, 120-21 (2023) (“This Court has long considered that the title of a statute and the heading of a section are tools available for the resolution of a doubt about the meaning of a statute.”) (internal quotations and citations omitted). Section 1225 is titled “Inspection by immigration officers; expedited removal of inadmissible arriving aliens; referral for a hearing[.]” Section 1226 is titled “apprehension and detention of aliens” with a focus on “arrest, detention, and release[.]” Thus, the text of the titles

indicate that § 1225 governs “arriving” noncitizens who are presently “seeking admission” into the United States,³ while § 1226 focuses on the apprehension and detention of those noncitizens already present in the country. See *Edahi v. Lewis*, No. 4:25-cv-129-RGJ, 2025 WL 3466682, at *7 (W.D. Ky. Nov. 27, 2025) (“The added word 3 This is supported by the text of § 1225, which focuses on limited and specific methods of entry, for example, via “crewman” or “stowaways,” leading to the conclusion that “Section 1225 is much more limited in scope than the United States asserts.” *Barrera*, 2025 WL 2690565, at *4. of ‘arriving’ supports the notion that the statute governs ‘arriving’ noncitizens, not those present already.”). Section 1225(a)(1) states that an “applicant for admission” is “an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or who arrives in the United States.” Pursuant to § 1225(b)(2)(A), any applicant for admission who is “seeking admission” and “is not clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to be admitted” must be detained. The analysis then, is twofold. For a noncitizen to be mandatorily detained under § 1225(b)(2)(A), they must be an applicant for admission who is also seeking admission. Other district courts have acknowledged that this “question is puzzling at first blush. How can an ‘applicant for admission’ not ‘seek admission?’” *J.G.O. v. Francis*, No. 25-cv-7233, 2025 WL 3040142, at *3 (S.D.N.Y. Oct. 28, 2025). However, this question is answered by looking to the statutory definition. To be an applicant for admission, “[a]ll that’s needed is presence without admission—in other words, it applies to the great number of undocumented immigrants who currently live here.” *Id.* By contrast, seeking admission “might mean something more than that—some active desire or process toward admission.” *Id.* One’s status as an “applicant for admission” under the definitional language of § 1225(a)(1) is distinct from the act of “applying for” or “seeking” admission. Congress provided a clear definition of aliens who are “applicants for admission.” 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1). And this definition turns on an individual’s physical presence in the United States. *Id.*; see also *Castañon-Nava v. U.S. Dep’t of Homeland Sec.*, 161 F.4th 1048, 1061 (7th Cir. 2025) (“[I]t is Congress’s prerogative to define a term however it wishes, and it has chosen to limit the definition of an ‘applicant for admission’ to ‘an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or who arrives in the United States.’”) (quoting 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1)). Thus, an alien present in the United States can qualify as an “applicant for admission” under § 1225 without also “seeking admission” by necessity. See *Castañon-Nava*, 161 F. 4th at 1061 (noting that Congress “could easily have included noncitizens who are ‘seeking admission’ within that definition but elected not to do so”). Because Zheng is neither an “arriving alien” nor “seeking admission” into the United States, the mandatory detention provisions contained § 1225(b)(2) do not apply to her. Respondent disagrees with this reading. He takes the position that for a noncitizen to qualify as an “applicant for admission” who is “seeking admission” she must merely be

(1) present in the United States, and (2) not be legally admitted by an immigration officer.

(Doc. # 4 at 6–7; see also Doc. # 4-4 at 19–22). Thus, Respondent contends that despite Zheng’s continued residence in the United States for more than two years she is still “seeking admission”

because “any alien who is an ‘applicant for admission’ is ‘seeking admission’ for purposes of Section 1252(b)(2)(A) [sic].” (Doc. # 4 at 7). Respondent’s interpretation of § 1225(b)(2)(A), therefore, calls for mandatory detention of every noncitizen present in the United States who has not been lawfully admitted. The Court finds this interpretation much too broad. See *Maldonado v. Olson*, No. 25-cv-3142, 2025 WL 2374411, at *12 (D. Minn. Aug. 15, 2025) (“[A]ccepting Respondents’ one-size-fits-all application of 1225(b)(2) to all aliens, with no distinctions, would violate fundamental canons of statutory construction.”). In reaching this conclusion, Respondent misconstrues, or ignores entirely, the word “seeking” in the phrase “seeking admission.” Respondent argues that a noncitizen who is merely present in the United States is actively “seeking admission ‘by operation of law.’” (Doc. # 4-4 at 29–30 (quoting *Matter of Lemus-Losa*, 25 I. & N. Dec. 734, 743-44 n. 6 (BIA 2012))). But the use of the present progressive term “seeking” “implies action.” *Barrera*, 2025 WL 2690565 at *4; see also *Diaz v. Martinez*, 792 F. Supp. 3d. 211, 218 (D. Mass. 2025) (“[T]he phrase ‘seeking admission[,]’ [though] undefined in the statute[,] [] necessarily implies some sort of present-tense action.”); *Edahi*, 2025 WL 3466682 at

*8 (“Seeking means ‘to go in search of’ and is synonymous with ‘pursue.’” (quoting Webster’s Dictionary (11th ed. 2024))). Furthermore, the INA defines the term “admission” as “the lawful entry of the alien into the United States after inspection and authorization by an immigration officer.” 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(13)(A) (emphasis added). Given that the word “entry” is left undefined by the INA, courts interpret it according to its “ordinary, contemporary, common meaning.” *Star Athletica, LLC v. Varsity Brands, Inc.*, 580 U.S. 405, 414 (2017) (internal quotations omitted); see also *Gustafson v. Alloyed Co., Inc.*, 513 U.S. 561, 585 (1995) (Thomas, J., dissenting) (“The canon that we construe a statutory term in accordance with its ordinary or natural meaning applies only in the absence of a statutory definition.” (cleaned up)). “That meaning is ‘entering into . . . (a country),’ which is ‘[t]o come or go in.” *J.G.O.*, 2025 WL 3040142, at *3 (quoting *Entry*, OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY (2d ed. 1989); *Enter*, OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY (2d ed. 1989)). Thus, it cannot be said that Zheng, a noncitizen who has resided in the United States for more than two years is “actively seeking admission.” See *J.G.O.*, 2025 WL 3040142, at *3 (“‘[S]eeking admission’ requires an alien to continue to want to go into the country. The problem . . . is that [the petitioner] is already here; you can’t go into a place where you already are.”). Furthermore, seeking lawful status or relief from removal is not the same as “seeking admission.” See *Sanchez v. Mayorkas*, 593 U.S. 409, 415 (2021) (observing that “[l]awful status and admission . . . are distinct concepts in immigration law: Establishing one does not necessarily establish the other”). Thus, a noncitizen present in the United States may seek lawful status without simultaneously seeking admission. *Id.* (noting that a noncitizen who received Temporary Protected Status was not therefore constructively admitted to the United States). Numerous district courts, including the undersigned Judge in multiple prior Orders, have come to the same conclusion. See *Barrera*, 2025 WL 2690565, at *4 (“Noncitizens

who are present in the country for years, like [petitioner] who has been here 20 years, are not actively ‘seeking admission.’”); Lopez-Campos, 2025 WL 2496379, at *7 (“There is no logical interpretation that would find that Lopez-Campos was actively ‘seeking admission’ after having resided here, albeit unlawfully, for twenty-six years.”); Ochoa Ochoa v. Noem, No. 25-cv-10865, 2025 WL 2938779, at *6 (N.D. Ill. Oct. 16, 2025) (“In agreement with other district courts, this court rejects Respondents’ expanded reading of 1225(b)(2) and the term “seeking admission.”). Likewise, the Seventh Circuit—the only circuit court to address the issue—agreed with this reading. Castañon-Nava, 161 F.4th at 1061 (“[p]ut another way, ‘U.S. immigration law authorizes the Government to detain certain aliens seeking admission into the country under §§ 1225(b)(1) and (b)(2). It also authorizes the Government to detain certain aliens already in the country pending the outcome of removal proceedings under §§ 1226(a) and (c)’”) (emphasis in original) (quoting Jennings v. Rodriguez, 583 U.S. 281, 289 (2018)). To adopt Respondent’s interpretation of § 1225(b)(2)(A) would render the phrase “seeking admission” “mere surplusage by equating it to ‘applicant for admission.’” Ochoa Ochoa, 2025 WL 2938779, at *6; see also Castañon-Nava, 161 F.4th at 1061 (noting that such a construction “would render § 1225(b)(2)(A)’s use of the phrase ‘seeking admission’ superfluous, violating one of the cardinal rules of statutory construction”); J.G.O., 2025 WL 3040142, at *3 (“[T]his is just another example of the government’s construction inviting surplusage into the statute. That Congress chose to include this additional phrase—‘seeking admission’ . . . suggests that it must mean something distinct.”). The Court declines to adopt such an expansive reading of § 1225(b)(2)(A).⁴ The Court now turns to the plain language of § 1226, which controls the “apprehension and detention of aliens.” Section 1226(a) permits a bond hearing if an “alien” who was “arrested and detained” on a “warrant issued by the Attorney General” remains in detention “pending a decision on whether the alien is to be removed from the United States.” The plain meaning of the statute is clear and applicable to Zheng—an alien who was arrested and remains detained by ICE pending removal proceedings. (Doc. # 1 ¶¶ 19-20). This is further bolstered by the record. That § 1225(b)(2)(A) applies to noncitizens seeking admission into the United States while § 1226 applies to those noncitizens who are already present in the United States comports with the broader structure and context of our immigration law. Castañon- Nava, 161 F.4th at 1061-62. Indeed, “[t]he distinction between an alien who has effected an entry into the United States and one who has never entered runs throughout immigration law.” Zadvydas v. Davis, 533 U.S. 678, 693 (2001); Leng May Ma v. Barber, 357 U.S. 185, 187 (1958) (noting that “our immigration laws have long made a distinction

⁴ The Court notes that in their Response, Respondent repeatedly references Matter of Yajure Hurtado, 29 I. & N. Dec. 216 (BIA 2025), an opinion from the Board of Immigration Appeals. Pursuant to the Supreme Court’s decision in Loper Bright, courts “need not defer to any agency interpretation of law just because a statute is ambiguous.” 603 U.S. at 412-413. between those aliens who have come to our shores seeking admission . . . and those who are within the United States after an entry, irrespective of its legality”) (emphasis added). Here, on the November 8,

2023 Notice to Appear issued to Zheng, DHS checked the box labeled “You are an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or paroled” rather than checking the box labeled “arriving alien.” (Doc. # -1 at 1) (emphasis added). This supports this Court’s conclusion and reaffirms the Supreme Court’s determination in *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, that § 1226(a) applies to aliens already present in the United States, while § 1225(b)(2)(A) applies to arriving aliens. 583 U.S. at 298, 303. Respondent’s new post hoc position is simply “impermissible.” *Dep’t of Homeland Sec. v. Regents of the Univ. of Cal.*, 591 U.S. 1, 22 (2020) (holding that “[t]he basic rule is clear: [a]n agency must defend its actions based on the reasons it gave when it acted,” not on “impermissible post hoc rationalizations”). Most compelling for this Court is the addition of the Laken Riley Act, signed into law in January 2025. The Laken Riley Act, which was incorporated into § 1226(c), provides that noncitizens who have been charged with, convicted of, or admitted to committing various listed crimes, are subject to mandatory detention. 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c). If, as Respondent argues, Congress had intended for § 1225 to govern all noncitizens who are present in the country, regardless of when or where they were detained, then why did Congress even bother passing that legislation? If Respondent’s reading of § 1225 is correct, then the addition of the Laken Riley Act would be superfluous. The Laken Riley Act added a mandatory detention requirement, “in an otherwise discretionary Section.” *Barrera*, 2025 WL 2690565, at *4. As other courts have noted, [i]f § 1225(b)(2) already mandated detention of any alien who has not been admitted, regardless of how long they have been here, then adding § 1226(c)(1)(E) to the statutory scheme was pointless and this Court, too, ‘will not find that Congress passed the Laken Riley Act to ‘perform the same work’ that was already covered by § 1225(b)(2). *Lopez-Campos*, 2025 WL 2496379, at *8 (quoting *Maldonado*, 2025 WL 237441, at *12); see also *id.* (“Respondents’ interpretation of the statutes would render [the Laken Riley Act] superfluous); *Ariza v. Noem*, No. 4:25-cv-165-RGJ, 2025 WL 3722014, at *6 (W.D. Ky. Dec. 23, 2025) (“If Section 1225(b)(2)(A) governed certain noncitizens as the United States claims it does, the Laken Riley Act would have been redundant and unnecessary.”); *Gomes v. Hyde*, No. 1:25-cv-11571, 2025 WL 1869299, at *7 (D. Mass. July 7, 2025) (“Such an interpretation, which would largely nullify a statute Congress enacted this very year, must be rejected.”); *Martinez*, 792 F. Supp. 3d. at 221 (“[I]f, as the Government argue[s] ... a non-citizen’s inadmissibility were alone already sufficient to mandate detention under section 1225(b)(2)(A), then the 2025 amendment would have no effect. This is a presumptively dubious result.”); *Selvin Adonay E.M. v. Noem et al*, No. 25-cv-3975, 2025 WL 3157839, at *6 (D. Minn. Nov. 12, 2025) (“the presumption against superfluity is at its strongest because the Court is interpreting two parts of the same statutory scheme, and Congress even amended the statutory scheme this year when it passed the Laken Riley Act.”). This Court agrees with its sister courts. Respondent fails to elaborate when, if § 1225(b)(2) applies to every single noncitizen’s detention proceeding, § 1226 would ever, if at all, come into play.⁵ The Court 5 Respondent makes various public policy arguments on why noncitizens who have entered the country without detection should not be treated more favorably than those who entered lawfully.

(Doc. # 4-4 at 44–48). While valid arguments, the text, as clearly indicated above, “does not currently reflect such public policy considerations.” *Maldonado*, 2025 WL 2374411, at *12. “Rather, such arguments may be made to Congress if Respondents would like to amend or repeal finds it difficult to conceive of a situation in which Congress would enact an insignificant superfluous statute for no other reason than to add words to the page. See *Stone v. I.N.S.*, 514 U.S. 386, 397 (1995) (“When Congress acts to amend a statute, we presume it intends its amendment to have real and substantial effect.”); see also *Marx v. Gen. Revenue Corp.*, 568 U.S. 371, 386 (2013) (“[T]he canon against surplusage is strongest when an interpretation would render superfluous another part of the same statutory scheme.”). The Court acknowledges that Respondent cites a string of nonbinding district court decisions supporting its interpretation. For example, the United States cites to *Mejia Olalde v. Noem et al.*, a case from the Eastern District of Missouri. (Doc. # 4-4 at 23). There, the court agreed with the government’s interpretation of § 1225(b)(2)(A), concluding that the petitioner was an applicant for admission because he was present in the United States and had not been legally admitted. No. 1:25-cv-00168-JMD, 2025 WL 3131942, at *3 (E.D. Mo. Nov. 10, 2025). In its analysis, the court looked not towards whether the petitioner was “seeking admission” but whether he was an “applicant for admission.” *Id.* at *2. Its reasoning rested in part on the conclusion that it “makes no sense to describe an active applicant for admission as somebody who is not ‘seeking’ admission.” *Id.* at *3. Yet, as the Court discussed above, “to be detained pursuant to Section 1225(b)(2)(A), that is precisely what the text requires.” *Edahi*, 2025 WL 3466682, at *12. “Holding as Olalde does would require the Court to ignore the plain statutory text. § 1225 or § 1226, but such policy arguments are not reflected in the Laken Riley Act amendment ... passed only a few months ago.” *Id.* But Courts must give effect to every word in the statute. . . In ignoring the very words of section 1225(b)(2)(A) Olalde defies this principle.” *Id.* Respondent also cites *Rojas v. Olson*, No. 25-cv-1437-bhl, 2025 WL 3033967 (E.D. Wis. Oct. 30, 2025). (Doc. # 4-4 at 23, 30, 33, 41). However, the Court is no more persuaded by this decision. Specifically, the Court is unconvinced because Rojas did not conclude that the recent addition of the Laken Riley Act would be rendered superfluous if § 1225(b)(2)(A) required mandatory detention of all noncitizens. See *Rojas*, 2025 WL 3033967, at *9 (“[L]egislation passed in 2025 has little bearing on the meaning of legislation enacted in 1996. Indeed, nothing in the Laken Riley Act suggests any Congressional thoughts concerning the issues presented in this case.”). This Court, and many others, disagree with that interpretation. See *Edahi*, 2025 WL 3466682, at *11 (“When Congress acts to amend a statute, we presume it intends its amendment to have real and substantial effect. . . Rojas’ reading of the Laken Riley Act underscores this very premise.”) (internal quotations omitted). Finally, pertinent legislative and enforcement history reinforces the Court’s conclusion. See *Loper Bright*, 603 U.S. at 386 (“[T]he longstanding practice of the Government—like any other interpretive aid—can inform [a court’s] determination of what the law is.”). Enacted in 1952, the INA “distinguished between aliens physically arriving in the United States and those who had entered the Country.” Library of Congress, Immigration

Detention: A Legal Overview (Sep. 16, 2019), https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45915#_Ref17891326. In 1996, Congress enacted the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (“IIRIRA”) which focused on whether the noncitizen “had been lawfully admitted into the country by immigration authorities.” *Id.* Since the IIRIRA’s enactment “the statutory framework governing detention has largely remained constant.” *Id.* In applying the INA to detention proceedings, the Government has, for the past thirty years, consistently applied § 1226(a). It was not until July of 2025 when DHS/ICE announced a new policy, titled “Interim Guidance Regarding Detention Authority for Applicants for Admission” where it deemed all persons who entered the United States without inspection “applicants for admission” under § 1225, that the Government changed course. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Detention of Applicants for Admission, (Sep. 18, 2025) <https://www.cbp.gov/document/foia-record/detention-applicants-admission>; see also Lopez-Campos, 2025 WL 2496379 at *5 (“For the past 30 years, the Government has applied Section 1226(a)[.]” It is only “now that . . . they want the Court to declare that the application of Section 1226(a) is incorrect.”). This sudden change contradicted the long- established understanding that § 1225(b) “applies primarily to aliens seeking entry into the United States” while § 1226(a) “applies to aliens already present in the United States.” Jennings, 583 U.S. at 298, 303; see also *id.* at 288 (“Section 1226(a) sets out the default rule for those aliens [already present in the United States.]”). Thus, the enforcement history reflects a longstanding practice of applying § 1226(a) to noncitizens already residing in the country, which is “powerful evidence that interpreting [the INA] in that way is natural and reasonable[.]” *Abramski v. U.S.*, 573 U.S. 169, 202-203 (2014) (Scalia, J., dissenting). “The plain language of the statutes, the overall structure, the intent of Congress, and over 30 years of agency action make clear that Section 1226(a) is the appropriate statutory framework . . . for noncitizens who are already in the country and facing removal.” Lopez-Campos, 2025 WL 2496397, at *5. Therefore, the Court finds that Zheng is not subject to § 1225(b)(2)(A). Rather, the facts of the case make clear that her detention is governed by § 1226(a). C. Due Process Because the Court has concluded that § 1226(a) is the appropriate statutory framework to apply to Zheng, the Court must now determine whether her current detention violates her due process rights. Respondent did not address this issue in his Response. The Fifth Amendment provides, in pertinent part, that no person shall be “deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law[.]” U.S. Const. amend. V. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Due Process Clause extends to all persons, regardless of citizenship status. See *A.A.R.P. v. Trump*, 605 U.S. 91, 94 (2025) (“[T]he Fifth Amendment entitles aliens to due process of law in the context of removal proceedings.” (quoting *Trump v. J.G.G.*, 604 U.S. 670, 673 (2025))). To determine whether a detainee’s due process rights have been violated, courts apply a three-part balancing test to weigh

(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 United States’ interest, including

the function involved and the fiscal and administrative burdens that the additional or substitute procedural requirement would entail. *Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 321 (1976). It is undisputed that Zheng has a cognizable private interest in avoiding detention without an opportunity for a bond hearing. See *Hamdi*, 542 U.S. at 531 (affirming “the fundamental nature of a citizen’s right to be free from involuntary confinement by his own government without due process of law[.]”). Indeed, “[f]reedom from bodily restraint has always been at the core of the liberty protected by the Due Process Clause[.]” *Foucha v. Louisiana*, 504 U.S. 71, 80 (1992). Second, the risk of erroneous deprivation of that interest is high if Zheng is not afforded a detention hearing. See *Edahi*, 2025 WL 3466682, at *14 (holding that detention “without any individualized assessment, leads to a high risk of erroneous deprivation of an individual’s liberty interest”) (citation omitted); *Yao v. Almodovar*, No. , 2025 WL 3653433, at *11 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 17, 2025) (finding that ICE’s “discretion-free detention of [the petitioner] abridged his rights under [8 U.S.C.] § 1226 and violated due process”) (citations omitted). As to the third factor, Respondent has not put forth any argument whatsoever advocating for the United States’ interest. The Court, on its own, concludes that the United States likely has a strong interest in immigration proceedings, but certainly, the “existing statutory and regulatory safeguards” which this Court discussed at length about above, “serve the governmental interest in public safety.” *Barrera*, 2025 WL 2690565, at *7 (quoting *Günaydin v. Trump*, No. 25-cv- 01151, 2025 WL 1459154, at *10 (D. Minn. May 21, 2025)). Accordingly, all three factors weigh in favor of Zheng. As other courts have concluded, Zheng’s detention without a bond hearing violates the due process rights afforded to her by the Fifth Amendment and she is therefore entitled to an individualized custody determination.

IV. CONCLUSION

Accordingly, for the reasons stated herein, IT IS ORDERED as follows:

- (1) Petitioner’s Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Doc. # 1) is GRANTED;
- (2) | Respondents are ORDERED to immediately release Petitioner, or in the alternative, provide her with a bond hearing under 8 U.S.C. 1226(a) within seven (7) days of the date of this Order; and
- (3) Respondents shall file a Status Report with this Court on or before February 17, 2026, to certify compliance with this Order. The Status Report shall include when the bond hearing occurred, if bond was granted or denied, and if denied, the reasons for that denial. This 3rd day of February, 2026. ee Signed By: Ay J David L. Bunning DB SS = Chief United States District Judge G:\Judge-DLB\DATA\ORDERS\Cov2026\26-12 MOO re Habeas Petition.docx 19