

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

Arelis Modesta Garcia Canales v. Jonathan Florentino, et al.

Garcia Canales · No. No. 26-cv-01461-ESK · Decided February 23, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of New Jersey granted Arelis Modesta Garcia Canales’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241. The court held that her detention was governed by 8 U.S.C. § 1226 rather than § 1225 because she was apprehended inside the United States after residing there for an extended period, and ordered her immediate release without additional conditions. The court also enjoined detention under § 1225, imposed a 14-day restriction on detention under § 1226(a), and retained jurisdiction over any future detention.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of New Jersey
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Edward S. Kiel
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of New Jersey
DECIDED	February 23, 2026
DOCKET	No. 26-cv-01461-ESK
DISPOSITION	writ_granted
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 challenging immigration detention without a bond hearing or individualized custody determination.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the legality of petitioner’s custody on her § 2241 habeas petition and determined whether the asserted statutory basis for detention authorized her continued custody.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished, nonprecedential United States district court opinion.
PARTIES	Arelis Modesta Garcia Canales v. Jonathan Florentino, et al.

TOPICS

- immigration detention
- federal habeas corpus
- removal proceedings
- statutory interpretation
- injunctions

PRACTICE AREAS

- immigration detention
- federal habeas corpus
- removal proceedings
- statutory interpretation
- equitable relief

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a noncitizen who entered the United States without inspection in 2022, was later apprehended inside the country after residing there for an extended period, and had no final removal order could be detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2) rather than 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a).
2. Whether 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9) deprived the district court of jurisdiction over a collateral challenge to continued detention.
3. Whether the government could defend an allegedly unlawful detention through an alternative statutory justification first raised during the litigation.
4. Whether immediate release and injunctive relief were appropriate remedies for the unlawful detention.

HOLDINGS

1. A noncitizen who entered without inspection but was apprehended inside the United States after residing there for an extended period is subject to detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1226 rather than 8 U.S.C. § 1225; detention under § 1226 requires an opportunity to seek bond.
2. Section 1252(b)(9) does not strip the district court of jurisdiction over a collateral challenge to continued detention that is not inextricably linked to a removal action.
3. The government may not transform an unlawful detention into a lawful one by asserting an alternative, retrospective statutory justification for the first time during habeas litigation.
4. The appropriate relief was to grant the § 2241 petition, order immediate release under the pre-detention conditions, return seized personal property, enjoin detention under § 1225, and retain jurisdiction to address any future detention.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“I conclude that petitioner is being unlawfully detained under respondents’ repeated invocation of 8 U.S.C. § 1225 because petitioner was apprehended inside the United States after residing here for an extended period, and therefore she should have been detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1226, which requires an opportunity to seek bond.” (¶ 8)

“I decline to allow respondents to transform an unlawful detention into a lawful one through alternative, retrospective, post hoc justification presented mid-litigation, as doing so would give the Government a free pass to violate a person’s statutory and constitutional rights first and search for authority later.” (¶ 11)

“Respondents are PERMANENTLY ENJOINED from rearresting or otherwise detaining petitioner under § 1225, which this Court has found inapplicable to her.” (Order ¶ 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Garcia Canales, a Venezuelan citizen, entered the United States without inspection in 2022. DHS arrested her on February 6, 2026, and detained her at the Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility in New Jersey. The record indicated that she had no criminal history and was not subject to a final order of removal. She received no bond hearing or individualized custody determination after her arrest.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Department of Homeland Security arrested and detained Garcia Canales on February 6, 2026. She filed a § 2241 petition, and the court ordered a response on February 17, 2026. Respondents answered that detention was authorized under 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2), but acknowledged that the statutory arguments and facts were materially identical to issues the court had previously rejected. The court granted the petition, ordered immediate release and return of seized property, imposed restrictions on rearrest and redetention, permanently enjoined detention under § 1225, retained jurisdiction, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

writ_granted

CASES CITED

- Ayala Amaya v. Bondi, No. 25-cv-16428, 2025 WL 3033880 (D.N.J. Oct. 30, 2025)
- Demirel v. Fed. Det. Ctr. Phila., No. 25-cv-05488, 2025 WL 3218243 (E.D. Pa. Nov. 18, 2025)
- Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi, No. 25-20496, 2026 WL 323330 (5th Cir. Feb. 6, 2026)
- Martinez v. McAleenan, 385 F. Supp. 3d 349, 366, 373 (S.D.N.Y. 2019)
- Khalil v. President, United States, 164 F.4th 259, 274 (3d Cir. 2026)
- Lopez Benitez v. Francis, 795 F. Supp. 3d 475, 486 (S.D.N.Y. 2025)
- Arias Gudino v. Lowe, 785 F. Supp. 3d 27, 46 n. 8 (M.D. Pa. 2025)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY ARELIS MODESTA GARCIA Case No. 26–cv–01461–ESK CANALES, Petitioner, OPINION AND ORDER v. JONATHAN FLORENTINO, et al., Respondents. THIS MATTER is before the Court on petitioner Arelis Modesta Garcia Canales’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241 (Petition) (ECF No. 1) and this Court’s February 17, 2026 order (ECF No. 2.)

Respondents oppose the Petition. (ECF No. 5.) 1. Petitioner is a citizen of Venezuela. (ECF No. 1 ¶ 1.) She entered the United States without inspection in 2022. (Id.) 2. The Department of Homeland Security (Department) arrested petitioner on February 6, 2026. (Id. ¶ 3.) 3. Petitioner was detained in Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility (Elizabeth Facility), in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

(Id.) 4. There is no indication that petitioner has a criminal history or that she is currently subject to a final order of removal. (Id. ¶¶ 25, 28.) 5. Notwithstanding the foregoing and no final order of removal having been entered, Department agents arrested and detained petitioner without providing her any bond hearing or other individualized custody determination following her detention.

(Id. ¶¶ 4, 5.) 6. Respondents filed an answer on February 20, 2026 arguing that petitioner is properly detained pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(2) because she is a noncitizen “who entered without inspection or parole and was initially detained by immigration authorities in the interior of the country without having been lawfully admitted.

As such, she is an ‘applicant for admission’ who is not entitled to a bond hearing.” (ECF No. 5 p. 2.) 7. Additionally, respondents acknowledge that the statutory arguments and facts in this case are materially identical to those that the Court has already rejected in *Ayala Amaya v. Bondi*, No. 25–cv–16428, 2025 WL 3033880, D.N.J. Oct. 30, 2025) and other cases.

(Id. pp. 1 n. 1, 2.) 8. I conclude that petitioner is being unlawfully detained under respondents’ repeated invocation of 8 U.S.C. § 1225 because petitioner was apprehended inside the United States after residing here for an extended period, and therefore she should have been detained under 8 U.S.C. § 1226, which requires an opportunity to seek bond.¹ See *Ayala Amaya*, 2025 WL 3033880, at *2–3.

9. I further note that federal courts have in near unanimity similarly rejected respondents’ position in approximately 300 cases to date, a number which climbs with every passing day. See, e.g., *Demirel v. Fed. Det. Ctr. Phila.*, No. 25–cv–05488, 2025 WL 3218243, at *4 (E.D. Pa. Nov. 18, 2025) (noting “the law is clear” and that “of the 288 district court decisions to address the issue, 282 have determined that § 1226(a) applies or likely applies in situations similar to those presented here.

Those decisions are plainly correct.”); but see *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, ____ F.4th ____, No. 25–20496, 2026 WL 323330 (5th Cir. Feb. 6, 2026) (holding that noncitizen’s status as an applicant for admission does not turn on where or how the noncitizen entered the United States).² 10.

The basis for the petitioner’s continued “detention [was] blatantly unlawful from the start, the only commensurate and appropriate equitable remedy to even partially restore [petitioner] is to immediate[ly] release [her] and enjoin the Government from further similar transgressions.” *Martinez v. McAleenan*, 385 F. Supp. 3d 349, 373 (S.D.N.Y. 2019). “[T]he Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld prisoners’ rights to challenge the constitutionality of their detentions, and allow[ed] courts to implement corrective remedies, regardless of whether there were other bases for the petitioners to be subsequently detained” Id. at 366.

1 I note that 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(9) does not strip the Court of jurisdiction over petitioner’s challenge to his continued detention because the challenge is collateral to “the removal process,” and is not “inextricably linked” to any removal action. See *Khalil v. President, United States*, 164 F.4th 259, 274 (3d Cir. 2026). 2 *Buenrostro-Mendez* is not binding authority, and I am unpersuaded by its reasoning for many of the reasons articulated in Judge Douglas’s dissent,

including that the majority's interpretation risks rendering significant portions of the statutory scheme superfluous and internally inconsistent.

See *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, 2026 WL 323330, at *10 (Douglas, J., dissenting). 11. I decline to allow respondents to transform an unlawful detention into a lawful one through alternative, retrospective, post hoc justification presented mid-litigation, as doing so would give the Government a free pass to violate a person's statutory and constitutional rights first and search for authority later. "The Constitution does not permit the United States Government to target people on the streets, arrest them without serving any papers, deny them meaningful due process, and detain them for arbitrary or indefinite periods of time while they engage in phishing expeditions to justify the arrests." *Id.* at 373; see also *Lopez Benitez v. Francis*, 795 F. Supp. 3d 475, 486 (S.D.N.Y.

2025) (releasing petitioner and explaining that the court "cannot credit [r]espondents' new position as to the basis for... detention, which was adopted post hoc and raised for the first time in this litigation."); *Arias Gudino v. Lowe*, 785 F. Supp. 3d 27, 46 n. 8 (M.D. Pa. 2025) (releasing petitioner and discussing the impropriety of allowing the government to proceed on "post hoc justifications for detention").

Accordingly, IT IS on this 23rd day of February 2026 ORDERED that: 1. Petitioner's § 2241 Petition is GRANTED. Respondents shall on this date IMMEDIATELY RELEASE petitioner under the same conditions, if any, that existed prior to her detention, including, but not limited to, release: (1) within the State of New Jersey; (2) without the imposition of additional conditions (such as ankle monitors or electronic tracking devices); and (3) with all clothing and outerwear worn at the time of detention, or other appropriate attire.

2. Respondents shall return to petitioner all personal property belonging to petitioner—including, but not limited to, any driver's license, passport, immigration documents, currency, or cellphone—that was seized at the time of detention and that is currently in their custody, possession, or control, whether maintained directly by respondents or by any contracted or affiliated facility, and that such property shall be returned in the same condition as it existed immediately prior to petitioner's detention.

3. Respondents shall file a letter on the docket confirming the date and time of petitioner's release and that the conditions set forth above have been satisfied. 4. Respondents are PERMANENTLY ENJOINED from rearresting or otherwise detaining petitioner under § 1225, which this Court has found inapplicable to her. 5. Respondents shall not arrest, detain, or otherwise take petitioner into custody under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) for a period of 14 days following her release, so as to ensure full effectuation of this Court's judgment and to prevent circumvention of the relief granted.

6. Any future detention or re-detention of petitioner must comply with all statutory and constitutional requirements, including the identification of a lawful statutory basis for detention and the provision of adequate procedural and substantive due process. 7.

To the extent that respondents seek to re-arrest or otherwise re- detain petitioner under any statutory authority, including but not limited to §§ 1225 or 1226, this Court shall retain jurisdiction over the matter and petitioner may move to reopen these proceedings before this Court without the need to file a new habeas petition. 8.

The Clerk shall CLOSE this case. /s/ Edward S. Kiel EDWARD S. KIEL UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE