

No. \_\_\_\_\_

---

IN THE SUPREME COURT  
OF THE UNITED STATES

---

JOSE HERNANDEZ-MARTINEZ, et al.,

Petitioners,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Respondent.

---

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari To  
The United States Court Of Appeals  
For The Ninth Circuit

---

APPENDIX TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI  
VOLUME 1

---

Stephen R. Sady  
Chief Deputy Federal Public Defender  
*Counsel of Record*  
Elizabeth G. Daily  
Assistant Federal Public Defender  
101 SW Main Street, Suite 1700  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
(503) 326-2123

Attorneys for Petitioners

## INDEX TO APPENDIX

<i>United States v Hernandez-Martinez</i> , 933 F.3d 1126 (9th Cir. 2019).....	1
District Court Orders .....	8
Hernandez-Martinez / Aispuro-Aispuro Order (CR 306).....	8
Renteria-Santana Order (CR 48) .....	9
Gonzales Order (CR 372) .....	10
Garcia-Zambrano / Magana-Solis / Bermudez-Ortiz Order (CR 389).....	11
Pulido-Aguilar Opinion & Order on Reconsideration (CR 99).....	12
Gonzalez Opinion & Order (CR 76).....	22
Bocanegra-Mosqueda Opinion & Order (CR 52).....	54
Gorbatenko Opinion & Order (CR 269).....	59

933 F.3d 1126

United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit.

UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Jose Luis HERNANDEZ-MARTINEZ, aka  
Efigenio Aispuro-Aispuro, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Efigenio Aispuro-Aispuro, aka Jose Luis  
Hernandez-Martinez, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Alejandro Renteria-Santana, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Bartolo Favela Gonzales, aka Bartolo, aka Gordo,  
aka Jose Everando Sanchez-Avendano, aka  
Jose Martin Verdugo, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Jose Garcia-Zambrano, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Edwin Magana-Solis, aka Manuel  
Cardenas-Landa, aka Roberto Lopez-  
Delgado, aka Meno, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Diego Bermudez-Ortiz, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Obdulio Alvarado-Ponce, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Kao Fey Saechao, aka Doughboy,  
Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Angel Ramirez-Arroyo, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Franky Enrique Alvarado-  
Gomez, Defendant-Appellant.

United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Oscar Francisco Macias-Ovalle,  
aka Tijuana, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Luis Pulido-Aguilar, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Jose Carranza Gonzalez, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Aleksander Gorbatenko, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Omar Perez-Medina, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Eduardo Bocanegra-Mosqueda,  
Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Roberto Cervantes-Esteva, aka Victor  
Antonio Cervantes, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Julian Alarcon Castaneda, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Sergio Aguilar-Sahagun, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Pablo Barajas Lopez, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Moises Lopez-Prado, Defendant-Appellant.  
United States of America, Plaintiff-Appellee,  
v.

Francisco Javier Cardenas-  
Coronel, Defendant-Appellant.

No. 15-30309, No. 15-30310, No. 15-30315,  
No. 15-30347, No. 15-30351, No. 15-30352,  
No. 15-30353, No. 16-30000, No.  
16-30170, No. 16-30199, No. 16-30294, No.  
17-30013, No. 15-30354, No. 15-30377, No.

15-30385, No. 16-30004, No. 15-30383,  
No. 15-30391, No. 16-30040, No. 16-30041,  
No. 16-30090, No. 16-30089, No. 16-30162

|  
Argued and Submitted March  
7, 2019 Portland, Oregon

|  
Filed August 13, 2019

### Synopsis

**Background:** Defendants appealed from orders of the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, 181 F.Supp.3d 842, 2015 WL 13236726, 2015 WL 13236827, 2016 WL 520966, 2016 WL 520954, 2016 WL 1222244, 2016 WL 3509414, Michael W. Mosman, Chief Judge, Garr M. King, Senior District Judge, Ann Aiken, J., Anna J. Brown, Senior District Judge, Robert E. Jones, Senior District Judge, Marco A. Hernandez, J., denying their motions for sentence reductions based on retroactive Sentencing Guidelines amendment which revised Guidelines' drug quantity table by reducing base offense level for most drugs and quantities by two levels.

The Court of Appeals, Berzon, Circuit Judge, held that it was bound by prior three-panel decision of the Court of Appeals which determined that policy statements of the Sentencing Commission could limit reduction of sentences for otherwise statutorily eligible terms of imprisonment.

Affirmed.

### Attorneys and Law Firms

\*1129 Stephen R. Sady (argued), Chief Deputy Federal Public Defender; Elizabeth G. Daily, Assistant Federal Public Defender; Office of the Federal Public Defender, Portland, Oregon; Rosalind M. Lee, Rosalind Manson Lee LLC, Eugene, Oregon; for Defendants-Appellants.

Kelly A. Zusman (argued), Appellate Chief; Billy J. Williams, United States Attorney; United States Attorney's Office, Portland, Oregon; for Plaintiff-Appellee.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Michael W. Mosman, Chief Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 3:98-cr-00572-MO-8, D.C. No. 3:06-cr-00274-MO-3, D.C. No. 3:10-cr-00250-MO-1, D.C. No. 3:06-

cr-00233-MO-1, D.C. No. 3:11-cr-00467-MO-4, D.C. No. 3:11-cr-00467-MO-8, D.C. No. 3:11-cr-00467-MO-3, D.C. No. 3:12-cr-00442-MO-1, D.C. No. 3:11-cr-00096-MO-1, D.C. No. 3:08-cr-00228-MO-3, D.C. No. 3:08-cr-00294-MO-1, D.C. No. 3:08-cr-00228-MO-1.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Garr M. King, District Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 3:10-cr-00142-KI-1.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Michael H. Simon, District Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 3:12-cr-00154-SI-1, D.C. No. 3:10-cr-00396-SI-1, D.C. No. 3:12-cr-00660-SI-1.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Ann L. Aiken, District Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 6:11-cr-60135-AA-1, D.C. No. 6:12-cr-00400-AA-1.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Anna J. Brown, District Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 3:11-cr-00412-BR-1, D.C. No. 3:10-cr-00311-BR-1, D.C. No. 3:07-cr-00050-BR-5.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Robert E. Jones, District Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 3:10-cr-00510-JO-3.

Appeals from the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, Marco A. Hernandez, District Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 3:12-cr-00227-HZ-1.

Before: Susan P. Graber and Marsha S. Berzon, Circuit Judges, and Eduardo C. Robreno, \* District Judge.

### OPINION

BERZON, Circuit Judge:

These consolidated appeals were brought by defendants seeking to reduce their sentences for drug-related crimes. They invoke 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2), which allows a court to reduce in certain circumstances a previously imposed sentence, and contend that the Supreme Court's recent interpretation of § 3582(c)(2) in *Hughes v. United States*, — U.S. —, 138 S. Ct. 1765, 201 L.Ed.2d 72 (2018), requires that their motions for resentencing be granted, Ninth Circuit precedent to the contrary notwithstanding. *See United States v. Padilla-Diaz*, 862 F.3d 856 (9th Cir. 2017).

**\*1130** We conclude that *Padilla-Diaz* and *Hughes* are fully compatible. As *Padilla-Diaz* remains binding precedent, we affirm the district courts' denials of defendants' motions to receive sentence reductions pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2).

## I

### A

We begin with a brief overview of the statutory framework governing sentence reduction proceedings. Ordinarily, a federal court “may not modify a term of imprisonment once it has been imposed.” See 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c). Congress has provided narrow exceptions to this proscription, including one based on changes to the United States Sentencing Guidelines (“Guidelines”): “A court may modify a defendant's term of imprisonment if the defendant was ‘sentenced ... based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered’ pursuant to a retroactive amendment to the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines.” *United States v. Rodriguez*, 921 F.3d 1149, 1153 (9th Cir. 2019) (quoting 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)).

Where the “based on” requirement is met, § 3582(c)(2) establishes a two-step inquiry for sentence reduction proceedings.<sup>1</sup> At the first step, the district court decides eligibility for sentence reduction by determining whether “a reduction is consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.” *Id.*; see also *Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817, 826, 130 S.Ct. 2683, 177 L.Ed.2d 271 (2010). The policy statement applicable to § 3582(c)(2), United States Sentencing Guidelines Manual (“U.S.S.G.”) § 1B1.10, authorizes a sentence reduction if, but only if, the retroactive amendment has the “effect of lowering the defendant's applicable [G]uideline[s] range.” U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(a)(2)(B). Applying this policy statement, a district court determines whether the Guidelines range is lowered by calculating the “amended [G]uideline[s] range that would have been applicable to the defendant if the [relevant amendment] to the [G]uidelines ... had been in effect at the time the defendant was sentenced.” *Id.* at § 1B1.10(b)(1).

But that determination may not be the end of a district court's inquiry into eligibility for sentence reduction. Another provision of the policy statement—the one of principal

relevance here—generally prohibits sentence reduction if the original term of imprisonment is below the lower end of the amended Guidelines range. See *id.* § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A).<sup>2</sup> The only exception to this limitation is where the defendant's original term of imprisonment was below the Guidelines range because of a reduction **\*1131** for substantial assistance to authorities and a § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction would be comparably below the amended Guidelines range. See *id.* at § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B).

The second step of the § 3582(c)(2) inquiry applies to defendants determined eligible for sentence reduction. The court considers the 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) factors and determines whether “the authorized reduction is warranted, either in whole or in part, according to the factors.” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826, 130 S.Ct. 2683; see also 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). But the “court's consideration of the § 3553(a) factors may not ‘serve to transform the proceedings under § 3582(c)(2) into plenary resentencing proceedings.’” *Rodriguez*, 921 F.3d at 1154 (quoting *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827, 130 S.Ct. 2683).<sup>3</sup>

### B

Each of the twenty-three defendants in these consolidated cases was convicted of one or more drug-related offenses. The defendants' original terms of imprisonment were therefore calculated according to the Guidelines' drug quantity table, which determines the base offense level for drug-related offenses according to drug type and weight. In 2014, the U.S. Sentencing Commission adopted Amendment 782, which revised the Guidelines' drug quantity table by reducing the base offense level for most drugs and quantities by two levels. See U.S.S.G. supp. app. C amend. 782 (Nov. 1, 2014); U.S.S.G. § 2D1.1(c). Amendment 782 was later made retroactive for defendants, including those in this consolidated proceeding, who had been sentenced before the adoption of the Amendment. U.S.S.G. supp. app. C amend. 788 (Nov. 1, 2014).

Invoking Amendment 782, each defendant filed a § 3582(c)(2) motion to reduce his sentence. The assigned district courts denied the sentence reduction motions, concluding that the defendants were categorically ineligible under § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) because downward variances or departures at the time of sentencing had resulted in original terms of imprisonment below the amended Guidelines range. The district courts further concluded that the defendants were not eligible for § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B)'s limited exception, as their downward

variances or departures had not been based on substantial assistance to authorities. Defendants appealed.

We review for abuse of discretion a district court's decision on a § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction motion. *United States v. Dunn*, 728 F.3d 1151, 1155 (9th Cir. 2013). “A district court may abuse its discretion if it does not apply the correct law or if it rests its decision on a clearly erroneous finding of material fact.” *United States v. Sprague*, 135 F.3d 1301, 1304 (9th Cir. 1998) (quoting *United States v. Plainbull*, 957 F.2d 724, 725 (9th Cir. 1992)).

## II

### A

*Padilla-Diaz* upheld § 1B1.10(b)(2), including its limited exception for substantial assistance departures, as consistent with both the governing statutes and constitutional requirements. 862 F.3d at 860–63. Defendants' principal argument is that we are not bound by *Padilla-Diaz* because the decision in that case is irreconcilable with the Supreme Court's later decision in *Hughes v. United States*. See *Miller v. Gammie*, 335 F.3d 889, 900 (9th Cir. 2003) (holding that the “issues decided by the \*1132 higher court” are controlling when “the relevant court of last resort ... undercut the theory or reasoning underlying the prior circuit precedent in such a way that the cases are clearly irreconcilable”).

To guide our inquiry as to whether *Padilla-Diaz* and *Hughes* are reconcilable we begin by examining an earlier Supreme Court decision, *Dillon*, 560 U.S. 817, 130 S.Ct. 2683. *Dillon* set forth the framework for reviewing motions for sentence reduction and explained the role policy statements serve in § 3582(c)(2) proceedings. We then examine *Padilla-Diaz* and *Hughes* in light of *Dillon*.

*Dillon* considered whether § 1B1.10, the policy statement that ordinarily includes the prohibition on reducing a sentence to a term below the amended Guidelines range, is advisory under *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220, 125 S.Ct. 738, 160 L.Ed.2d 621 (2005). In *Booker*, the Court held that the Guidelines are advisory in sentencing proceedings and so do not trigger the Sixth Amendment issues that arise under a mandatory sentencing regime. *Id.* at 243–44, 125 S.Ct. 738. The defendant in *Dillon* contended that *Booker*'s reasoning as to general sentencing proceedings applies with equal force

to § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction proceedings, such that § 1B1.10 is advisory only. 560 U.S. at 825, 130 S.Ct. 2683.

*Dillon*, rejecting that argument, held that § 1B1.10 is binding in § 3582(c)(2) proceedings. *Id.* at 825–31, 130 S.Ct. 2683. The Court reasoned that “sentence-modification proceedings authorized by § 3582(c)(2) are not constitutionally compelled,” and so do not implicate the Sixth Amendment concerns present in *Booker*. *Id.* at 828, 130 S.Ct. 2683. In distinguishing § 3582(c)(2) proceedings from the sentencing proceedings in *Booker*, *Dillon* emphasized that “§ 3582(c)(2) represents a congressional act of lenity intended to give prisoners the benefit of later enacted adjustments to the judgments reflected in the Guidelines.” *Id.*

The distinction *Dillon* drew between general sentencing proceedings and § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction proceedings informed our holding in *Padilla-Diaz*. The *Padilla-Diaz* defendants each had been accorded downward departures or variances at their original sentencings, with the result that their terms of imprisonment were below the later-amended Guidelines range. 862 F.3d at 859. The departures or variances were not based on substantial assistance to authorities. See *id.* As the defendants' original sentences made them categorically ineligible for sentence reduction under § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A), the district courts refused to consider any reduction. The defendants in *Padilla-Diaz* raised two challenges relevant to our inquiry here.

First, the *Padilla-Diaz* defendants argued that U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) conflicts with 28 U.S.C. § 991(b), the statute granting the U.S. Sentencing Commission broad authority over the promulgation of Guidelines amendments. They contended that § 991(b)(1)(B) granted the U.S. Sentencing Commission the authority to “‘establish sentencing policies and practices’ that ‘avoid[ ] unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants,’ ” *id.* at 860 (quoting 28 U.S.C. § 991(b)), and that U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) generated such disparities by “nullif[ying] departures and variances from the [G]uideline[s] range.” *Id.* at 861. We acknowledged in *Padilla-Diaz* that § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) occasionally does lead to anomalous results but held that § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) and § 991(b) were not in conflict. *Id.* *Padilla-Diaz* reasoned that § 991(b) was a statement of the U.S. Sentencing Commission's overall purposes and goals, not a specific directive requiring strict conformance such that \*1133 § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) could run afoul of it.<sup>4</sup> Relying on *Dillon*, *Padilla-Diaz* also noted that a § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction, as an act of lenity, is “not constrained” by general sentencing policies, such as

maintaining uniformity and avoiding unwarranted disparities. *Id.* (citing *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 828, 130 S.Ct. 2683).

Second, the defendants in *Padilla-Diaz* argued that § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) violated the Fifth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection because it “irrationally den[ied] sentence reductions to offenders who received lower sentences while granting them to those who originally received higher sentences.” *Id.* at 862. The government offered two justifications for the Guidelines policy statement's disparate treatment of the two groups of defendants: Making defendants' substantial assistance the only factor considered (1) simplifies sentence reduction proceedings, and (2) encourages defendants to cooperate with the government. *Id.* Acknowledging, once again, that § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) “will sometimes produce unequal and arguably unfair results,” *Padilla-Diaz* held that the sentence reduction limitation survived rational basis review on the basis of those two justifications. *Id.*

The following year, the Supreme Court decided *Hughes*. The question considered in *Hughes* was entirely different from those addressed in *Padilla-Diaz*.

*Hughes* considered for a second time an issue that had been before the Court several years earlier, in *Freeman v. United States*, 564 U.S. 522, 131 S.Ct. 2685, 180 L.Ed.2d 519 (2011): Is a defendant who enters into a Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11(c)(1)(C) plea agreement (“Type-C agreement”) eligible for § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction upon the enactment of a retroactive amendment to the Guidelines?<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the issue in *Hughes* was whether a Type-C agreement is “based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered,” such that a defendant is eligible for sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2). *See* 138 S. Ct. at 1773 (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> *Hughes* held that a \*1134 “sentence imposed pursuant to a Type-C agreement is ‘based on’ the defendant's Guidelines range so long as that range was part of the framework the district court relied on in imposing the sentence or accepting the agreement.” *Id.* at 1775. *Hughes*'s original sentence was not below the amended Guidelines range, and *Hughes* did not consider at all the import of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A), *id.* at 1774, the provision limiting sentence reductions to the lowest term recommended by the revised Guidelines range.

## B

Our case law is clear as to the effect of intervening law on prior circuit precedent: “[W]here the reasoning or theory of our prior circuit authority is clearly irreconcilable with the reasoning or theory of intervening higher authority, a three-judge panel should consider itself bound by the later and controlling authority, and should reject the prior circuit opinion as having been effectively overruled.” *Gammie*, 335 F.3d at 893.

Defendants contend that *Padilla-Diaz* and *Hughes* are clearly irreconcilable in two respects. First, defendants argue that *Hughes* rejected *Padilla-Diaz*'s premise that general sentencing policies do not constrain § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction proceedings. As support for this argument, defendants point to several passages in *Hughes* in which the Court discussed the central purpose of the Sentencing Reform Act and two of its key sentencing policies—uniformity and avoiding unwarranted sentencing disparities.

But *Hughes* did not conclude that general sentencing policies constrain § 3582(c)(2) proceedings. Although *Hughes* referenced the sentencing goals of uniformity and avoiding unwarranted disparities, it did so primarily to highlight the sentencing disparities among courts in different federal circuits stemming from the Court's fractured opinion in *Freeman*. *See Hughes*, 138 S. Ct. at 1774–75; *see also id.* at 1779 (Sotomayor, J., concurring). Additionally, in discussing the Sentencing Reform Act's uniformity goal, *Hughes* highlighted that the Act's purpose was furthered by interpreting § 3582(c)(2) as applying to *any* type of plea agreement “based on” the Guidelines, including Type-C agreements. *Id.* at 1776 (majority opinion). Nothing in *Hughes* addressed inter-defendant sentencing uniformity more generally, much less the sentence reduction limitation at issue here. Moreover, nothing in *Hughes* upended the Court's statement in *Dillon* that § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction proceedings are acts of lenity, *see* 560 U.S. at 828, 130 S.Ct. 2683, or *Padilla-Diaz*'s reasoning, based on *Dillon*, that such proceedings are therefore not ordinarily constrained by general sentencing policies, *see* 862 F.3d at 861.

Second, defendants contend that the relevant policy statement, § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A), conflicts with § 3582(c)(2) as interpreted in *Hughes*, as well as in *Koons v. United States*, — U.S. —, 138 S. Ct. 1783, 201 L.Ed.2d 93 (2018), and that *Padilla-Diaz* misunderstood the scope of § 3582(c)(2). Specifically, defendants interpret *Hughes* and *Koons*, as *requiring* sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2) for *every* term of imprisonment “based on” the Guidelines

and argue that policy statements, such as § 1B1.10(b)(2) (A), may not limit the reduction of sentences for otherwise statutorily eligible terms of imprisonment. That argument is unpersuasive.

For starters, the statute expressly permits the U.S. Sentencing Commission to \*1135 delineate sentence reduction eligibility through policy statements. Section 3582(c)(2) reads:

[I]n the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission ..., the court may reduce the term of imprisonment, after considering the factors set forth in section 3553(a) ..., *if such a reduction is consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.*

(emphasis added). Given that the statute's plain text requires consideration of applicable policy statements, 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and the Guidelines policy statement, § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A), are not in conflict. Instead, pursuant to the statutory mandate, § 3582(c)(2) and applicable policy statements work in concert to determine eligibility for sentence reduction.<sup>7</sup> Nothing in *Hughes* suggests otherwise.

Defendants' invocation of *Koons* is as misplaced as its reliance on *Hughes*. The defendants in *Koons* did not satisfy § 3582(c)(2)'s "based on" requirement because their sentences were based on mandatory minimums and substantial assistance to authorities. They maintained that they were nonetheless eligible for sentence reduction because the applicable Guidelines policy statement, § 1B1.10(c), contemplated reductions for defendants in their position.<sup>8</sup> *Koons*, 138 S. Ct. at 1790. In rejecting that argument, *Koons* concluded that a "policy statement cannot alter § 3582(c)(2), which applies only when a sentence was 'based on' a subsequently lowered range." *Id.* *Koons* explained that

"[t]he Sentencing Commission may limit the application of its retroactive Guidelines amendments through its 'applicable policy statements.' But policy statements cannot make a defendant eligible when § 3582(c)(2) makes him ineligible." *Id.* (internal citations omitted) (quoting *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 824–26, 130 S.Ct. 2683).

Defendants argue here that the inverse of the reasoning in *Koons* is also true—that is, policy statements cannot render a defendant ineligible if they are otherwise eligible under § 3582(c)(2)'s "based on" requirement. As noted previously, § 3582(c)(2) commands otherwise; it permits policy statements to render a defendant ineligible for sentence reduction. In other words, the statute permits a sentence reduction when both of the following conditions are true—(A) the original term was "based on" a sentencing range that is later reduced; *and* (B) the reduction is consistent with the U.S. Sentencing Commission's policy statements. The problem in *Koons* was that (A) was not true; the problem here is that (B) is not true. Again, *Koons* explicitly recognized the second limitation, stating that "[t]he Sentencing Commission may limit the application of its retroactive Guidelines amendments through its 'applicable policy statements.' " *Id.*

In sum, the intervening decision in *Hughes* (as well as the opinion in *Koons*) is \*1136 not in conflict with *Padilla-Diaz*. We are therefore bound by *Padilla-Diaz*'s conclusion regarding the interplay between the Guidelines policy statement contained in § 1B1.10(b)(2) and § 3582(c)(2).

### III

As *Padilla-Diaz* remains binding circuit precedent, defendants' various arguments on appeal are foreclosed.<sup>9</sup> We affirm the district courts' denials of the motions for sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2).

**AFFIRMED.**

#### All Citations

933 F.3d 1126, 19 Cal. Daily Op. Serv. 7961, 2019 Daily Journal D.A.R. 7593

#### Footnotes



- \* The Honorable Eduardo C. Robreno, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, sitting by designation.
- 1 There is no dispute in this case that the original sentences were "based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered by the U.S. Sentencing Commission," and so qualify for sentence reduction in that respect. 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2).
- 2 Section 1B1.10(b)(2) reads in full:
- (A) Limitation.—Except as provided in subdivision (B), the court shall not reduce the defendant's term of imprisonment under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and this policy statement to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection.
- (B) Exception for Substantial Assistance.—If the term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing pursuant to a government motion to reflect the defendant's substantial assistance to authorities, a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection may be appropriate.
- (C) Prohibition.—In no event may the reduced term of imprisonment be less than the term of imprisonment the defendant has already served.
- 3 This second step of the § 3582(c)(2) inquiry is not pertinent here. The only question on appeal is whether the district courts correctly determined that the defendants were ineligible for sentence reduction under § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A).
- 4 *United States v. Tercero*, 734 F.3d 979 (9th Cir. 2013), addressed an issue similar to the statutory question posed in *Padilla-Diaz*. In *Tercero*, the district court reduced the defendant's sentence to a term at the lower end of the amended Guidelines range but denied the defendant's request for a further downward departure. *Id.* at 981. The district court concluded that § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) prohibited any further reduction. *Id.* Among other matters, the defendant argued that § 1B1.10 conflicts with the Guidelines' purpose of instituting an "effective, fair sentencing system, with honest, uniform and proportionate sentences," because it prohibited the court from reducing her sentence further in light of her minor role in the offense. *Id.* at 983 (internal quotation marks omitted). We rejected the argument, concluding that the district court considered fairness in the original sentencing by considering the 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) factors then. *Id.*
- 5 In *Freeman*, no opinion or rationale commanded a majority of the Court and the federal circuits split in their application of the divided disposition. Invoking *Marks v. United States*, 430 U.S. 188, 97 S.Ct. 990, 51 L.Ed.2d 260 (1977), and its direction to adopt the "narrowest" opinion, eight circuits adopted the reasoning in Justice Sotomayor's concurrence, where she concurred only in the judgment and concluded that Type-C agreements are usually "based on" the agreements themselves, not the Guidelines. See *Freeman*, 564 U.S. at 535–36, 131 S.Ct. 2685 (Sotomayor, J., concurring); *Hughes*, 138 S. Ct. at 1771. Two circuits, including our court, adopted the plurality opinion, which concluded that a defendant who pleaded guilty under a Type-C agreement may be eligible for sentence reduction if the term is "based on" a later-amended Guidelines range. See *Freeman*, 564 U.S. at 526, 131 S.Ct. 2685; *Hughes*, 138 S. Ct. at 1771.
- 6 In a Type-C agreement, the government and defendant stipulate to a "specific sentence or sentencing range" or the applicability or inapplicability of "a particular provision of the Sentencing Guidelines, or policy statement, or sentencing factor." Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(C). The district court must approve a Type-C agreement. A court may accept such an agreement only if it is either "within the applicable [G]uideline[s] range" or outside the Guidelines range with "justifiable reasons ... set forth with specificity." U.S.S.G. § 6B1.2(c). Once the court accepts a Type-C agreement, it is binding on the court. See Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(C).
- 7 We are not suggesting that *any* eligibility restriction in a policy statement would be valid. There could, for example, be policy statements applicable to sentence reduction proceedings that are invalid because inconsistent with a statutory provision other than § 3582(c)(2).
- 8 Section 1B1.10(c) provides that, if the defendant provided substantial assistance to authorities and on that basis the court could impose a term of imprisonment below the mandatory minimum, the term of imprisonment should be determined without regard to U.S.S.G. § 5G1.1 (Sentencing on a Single Count of Conviction) or U.S.S.G. § 5G1.2 (Sentencing on Multiple Counts of Conviction).
- 9 Defendants also argue for reconsideration of the equal protection argument raised in *Padilla-Diaz*. Because *Padilla-Diaz* already rejected the argument, see 862 F.3d at 862, and remains binding circuit precedent, defendants' equal protection argument is also foreclosed.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON  
PORTLAND DIVISION

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

No. 3:98-cr-00572-8-MO  
No. 3:06-cr-00274-MO  
ORDER

**v.**

**EFIGENIO AISPURO-AISPURO,  
a.k.a Jose Luis Hernandez-Martinez,**

Defendant.

**MOSMAN, J.,**

Defendant is ineligible for a reduction in sentence under Amendment 782 because he was originally sentenced below the advisory Guideline range. Therefore, Defendant's Motion to Reduce Sentence [79] is DENIED.

DATED this 7 day of October, 2015.

/s/ Michael W. Mosman  
**MICHAEL W. MOSMAN**  
United States District Judge

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON  
PORTLAND DIVISION

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

v.

No. 3:10-cr-00250-MO  
ORDER

**ALEJANDRO RENTERIA-SANTANA**

Defendant.

**MOSMAN, J.,**

Defendant is ineligible for a reduction in sentence under Amendment 782 because his original sentence is at the bottom of the new advisory Guideline range. Therefore, Defendant's Motion to Reduce Sentence [44] is DENIED.

DATED this 13th day of October, 2015.

/s/ Michael W. Mosman  
MICHAEL W. MOSMAN  
United States District Judge

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON  
PORTLAND DIVISION

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

No. 3:06-cr-233-01-MO

v.

ORDER


**BARTOLO FAVELA GONZALES,**

Defendant.

**MOSMAN, J.,**

Defendant is ineligible for a reduction in sentence under Amendment 782 because he was originally sentenced below the advisory Guideline range. Therefore, Defendant's Motion to Reduce Sentence [351] is DENIED.

DATED this 24 day of November, 2015.

  
MICHAEL W. MOSMAN  
United States District Judge

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON  
PORTLAND DIVISION

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

No. 3:11-cr-00467-3,-4,-8-MO

v.

ORDER

**DIEGO BERMUDEZ-ORTIZ,  
JOSE GARCIA-ZAMBRANO,  
and EDWIN MAGANA-SOLIS,**

Defendants.

**MOSMAN, J.,**

Defendants are ineligible for a reduction in sentence under Amendment 782 because they were originally sentenced below the advisory Guideline range. Therefore, Defendants' Amended Joint Motion to Reduce Sentence [383] is DENIED.

DATED this 12th day of November, 2015.

/s/ Michael W. Mosman  
MICHAEL W. MOSMAN  
United States District Judge

1 -- ORDER

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF OREGON

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,**

Plaintiff,

v.

**LUIS PULIDO-AGUILAR,**

Defendant.

Case No. 3:10-cr-00142-KI

OPINION AND ORDER  
ON RECONSIDERATION

Billy J. Williams  
Acting United States Attorney  
District of Oregon  
Leah Bolstad  
Assistant United States Attorney  
1000 SW Third Ave., Suite 600  
Portland, OR 97204-2902

Attorneys for Plaintiff

Stephen R. Sady  
Chief Deputy Federal Defender  
Elizabeth G. Daily  
Research & Writing Attorney

Page 1 - OPINION AND ORDER ON RECONSIDERATION

101 SW Main Street, Suite 1700  
Portland, OR 97204

Attorneys for Defendant

KING, Judge:

Defendant Luis Pulido-Aguilar seeks reconsideration of the Opinion and Order issued November 5, 2015, asking me to withdraw the third section of the Opinion in which I indicated I would decline to use my discretionary authority to reduce his sentence [97]. I grant his request and reissue the Opinion and Order without section III.

Pulido-Aguilar seeks a reduction of his 151-month sentence of imprisonment. Pending before me is Pulido-Aguilar's Motion to Reduce Sentence [84]. For the reasons set forth below, I deny the motion.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Pulido-Aguilar entered a guilty plea to one count of possessing with the intent to distribute methamphetamine, in an amount exceeding 50 grams of actual methamphetamine.

At the sentencing hearing on August 20, 2012, I found the total offense level was 35,<sup>1</sup> with a criminal history category of IV,<sup>2</sup> rendering a guideline range of 235 to 293 months. The government recommended a sentence of 188 months. I granted Pulido-Aguilar's request for a sentence below the advisory guideline range and imposed a prison sentence of 151 months.

On August 10, 2015, Pulido-Aguilar filed a Motion to Reduce Sentence.

---

<sup>1</sup>Pulido-Aguilar's base offense level was 38. With a 3-level adjustment for acceptance of responsibility, his total offense level was 35.

<sup>2</sup>The parties are correct that the Court made a scrivener's error when it recorded Pulido-Aguilar's criminal history as a category III in the Statement of Reasons.

## LEGAL STANDARDS

When a guideline range has subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission, the court “may reduce a term of imprisonment, . . . if such a reduction is consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.” 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). In United States Sentencing Guideline (“U.S.S.G.”) § 1B1.10, the Sentencing Commission set out its policy for addressing an amended guideline range, reiterating that the Court “may reduce the defendant’s term of imprisonment as provided by 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2),” but that “any such reduction in the defendant’s term of imprisonment shall be consistent with this policy statement.” U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(a)(1). In determining whether a reduction is available, the court must “determine the amended guideline range that would have been applicable to the defendant if the amendment(s) to the guidelines . . . had been in effect at the time the defendant was sentenced.” U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(1). Unless the defendant received a reduction for substantial assistance at his sentencing, “the court shall not reduce the defendant’s term of imprisonment . . . to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection.” U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A).

If the offender is eligible for a sentence modification, the Court considers whether application of the factors in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) warrants reduction of the sentence. *Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817, 827 (2010).

## DISCUSSION

Pulido-Aguilar relies on the Sentencing Commission’s guideline amendment, made retroactive to previously sentenced inmates, which changed the offense levels in U.S.S.G.



§ 2D1.1 for some drug offenses. U.S.S.G., App. C, Amend. 782 and 788. He argues he is entitled to a sentence of 121 months, which would be at the low end of the guideline range after crediting him with the previously granted § 3553(a) downward variance.

Pulido-Aguilar is not eligible for a sentence reduction. Application of the guideline amendment would render a total offense level of 33.<sup>3</sup> With a criminal history category IV, Pulido-Aguilar would fall in the sentencing range of 188-235 months—a range higher than the 151-month sentence I imposed. “[T]he court shall not reduce the defendant’s term of imprisonment under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) . . . to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range[,]” except in the case of a substantial assistance departure. U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A). The “amended guideline range” must be calculated without consideration of any departure or variance previously provided, other than for substantial assistance under § 5K1.1. See U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10, Appl. Notes 1(A) (new guideline range to be determined “before consideration of any departure provision in the Guidelines Manual or any variance”); Appl. Note 3 (reduction not authorized if court’s original sentence fell below guideline range other than for substantial assistance). As a result, Pulido-Aguilar is ineligible for a sentence reduction. See *United States v. Hogan*, 722 F.3d 55, 62 (1<sup>st</sup> Cir. 2013) (“Every circuit to have addressed the issue agrees that § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) bars a district court from lowering a defendant’s below-guideline sentence unless the departure at his original sentencing was based on his substantial assistance to the government,” citing Third, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuit decisions).

---

<sup>3</sup>With the guideline amendment, Pulido-Aguilar would land at base offense level 36. The acceptance of responsibility adjustment puts him at a total offense level of 33.

Pulido-Aguilar argues ignoring previously awarded variances conflicts with statutory directives to avoid unwarranted sentencing disparities and to issue individualized sentences. He also contends applying the guidelines to deny offenders previously earned variances is a violation of the Equal Protection Clause because it means offenders who are more deserving of a reduction do not benefit from the change. He urges me to employ the doctrine of constitutional avoidance and construe the guideline limitation to incorporate previously awarded variances and departures when sentencing him under the amended guideline range.

I. Whether § 1B1.10 Conflicts with Statutory Requirements

Pulido-Aguilar points out that the statutory purposes of the Sentencing Guidelines are to “assure the meeting of the purposes of sentencing as set forth in § 3553(a)(2),” “avoid[] unwarranted sentencing disparities” among similarly-situated defendants, and “maintain[] sufficient flexibility to permit individualized sentencing decisions[.]” 28 U.S.C. § 991(b). He contends the limitation in § 1B1.10(b)(2), which prohibits the court from reducing a defendant’s term below the amended guideline range, conflicts with these statutory purposes by undermining the court’s authority to impose a sentence reflective of the defendant’s individual circumstances and conduct. He suggests the effect of the current scheme is to eliminate the carefully conceived differences between defendants’ sentences. *See* Def.’s Mem. 10-11 (e.g., Defendant A who initially received no departures/variances will end up with the same sentence as Defendant B who

received a two-level variance for diminished capacity).<sup>4</sup> In short, according to Pulido-Aguilar, the limitation is inconsistent with the originating statute.

The government relies on *United States v. Forde*, No. 04 Cr. 0048-10 (JSR), 2012 WL 2045851, at \*2 (S.D.N.Y. June 5, 2012), to suggest 28 U.S.C. § 991(b) has no place in § 3582(c) sentence reduction proceedings. I do not address this argument because the Ninth Circuit has already recognized the Commission as the authority tasked with promulgating policy statements that, “in the view of the Commission,” further the purposes of sentencing. *United States v. Davis*, 739 F.3d 1222, 1225 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2014). The Commission adopted the limitation at issue here only after considering factors such as the complexity of employing a change, the prospect of litigation, uniformity in sentencing, and avoiding windfalls to defendants who had previously received a departure or variance due to high base offense levels for drug trafficking offenses. *See id.* (describing reasons for policy adoption). As the Ninth Circuit concluded, “In the Commission’s view, prohibiting reductions below the amended guidelines range except in the case of substantial assistance to the government struck the appropriate balance. The Commission did not exceed its discretionary authority in making this policy judgment.” *Id.*

Further, as the Eleventh Circuit recognized:

In the words of the Supreme Court, in enacting § 3582(c)(2) “Congress intended to authorize only a limited adjustment to an otherwise final sentence,” to be done

---

<sup>4</sup> “[T]he previous version of § 1B1.10(b) permitted defendants who received a below-guidelines departure or variance during an original sentencing proceeding to receive a comparable reduction below the new guidelines range in a § 3582(c)(2) sentence reduction proceeding.” *United States v. Davis*, 739 F.3d 1222, 1224 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2014) (quoting U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(2) (2010)). In fact, as Pulido-Aguilar reports, “throughout its history, § 1B1.10 encouraged courts to adhere to prior sentencing decisions.” Def.’s Mem. 6. The new limitation prohibiting reductions below “the minimum of the amended guideline range” did not emerge until 2011.

within the “narrow bounds established by the Commission.” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826, 831. And in the words of the Third Circuit speaking about § 1B1.10(b), “Nowhere did Congress require that the Commission permit judges to fashion a reduction with exactly the same tools—departures and variances—they originally used to set an appropriate sentence.” [*United States v.*] *Berberena*, [694 F.3d 514, 521 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. 2012)]. Instead of overriding the effect of the sentencing court’s original departures and variances, “the Commission has merely limited the extent to which new ones can be awarded in § 3582(c)(2) proceedings.” *Id.* The § 1B1.10(b) policy statement neither required nor permitted the district court in this case to undo any departure or variance decision it had made when it originally sentenced [the defendant].

*United States v. Colon*, 707 F.3d 1255, 1260 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2013). In sum, Pulido-Aguilar is not eligible for a sentence reduction because he already received a below-guidelines sentence, and that limitation is not at odds with the statutory scheme.

## II. Whether § 1B1.10(b) Violates the Equal Protection Clause

“The liberty protected by the Fifth Amendment’s Due Process Clause contains within it the prohibition against denying to any person the equal protection of the laws.” *United States v. Windsor*, 133 S. Ct. 2675, 2695 (2013); *United States v. Navarro*, 800 F.3d 1104, 1112 n.6 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2015) (quoting *Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld*, 420 U.S. 636, 638 n.2 (1975)) (technically Fourteenth Amendment does not apply to the federal government, but the “approach to Fifth Amendment equal protection claims has always been precisely the same as to equal protection claims under the Fourteenth Amendment”).

Since no suspect class or deprivation of a fundamental right is at issue, the Commission’s reason for eliminating from eligibility the class of offenders who received a sentence below the amended guideline range must be “rationally related to a legitimate government interest.” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1113. It is Pulido-Aguilar’s burden to “disprove the rationality of the relationship between the classification and the purpose.” *Id.* In fact, Pulido-Aguilar has the

difficult burden of rebutting every conceivable ground for the limitation. *United States v. Salerno*, 481 U.S. 739, 745 (1987) (to succeed on a facial challenge under the Equal Protection Clause, the plaintiffs must show “that no set of circumstances exists under which the [a]ct would be valid.”).

“A statutory classification fails rational-basis review only when it rests on grounds wholly irrelevant to the achievement of the State’s objective.” *Heller v. Doe*, 509 U.S. 312, 324 (1993) (citations and internal quotation marks omitted). I agree with the government that the Commission’s treatment of offenders is rationally related to its legitimate interests. The Commission reported that the previous rule had generated litigation and been difficult to apply. Notice of Final Action Regarding Amendment to Policy Statement 1B1.10, 76 Fed. Reg. 41,332 (July 13, 2011). It decided to enact a limitation prohibiting reductions below the amended guideline range to “promote[] conformity with the amended guideline range and avoid[] undue complexity and litigation.” *Id.* at 41,334; *see also* U.S.S.G., App. C, Amend. 759 (2011). In addition, “[t]he Commission was also concerned that retroactively amending the guidelines could result in a windfall for defendants who had already received a departure or variance, especially one that took into account the disparity in treatment between powder and crack cocaine that the [Fair Sentencing Act] sought to correct.” *Davis*, 739 F.3d at 1225.<sup>5</sup>

Pulido-Aguilar argues the limitation is irrational because it means that the class of defendants who received non-cooperation departures or variances are denied the benefit of the guideline amendment, even though they are the least dangerous and most deserving, while a

---

<sup>5</sup> For the reasons outlined in Pulido-Aguilar’s reply, I am not persuaded by the other rationale offered by the government of the need to avoid geographic disparities. Gov’t Mem. 11 (ECF No. 87); Def.’s Reply 7-9 (ECF No. 88).

second class of defendants—who are more dangerous and less deserving—get the benefit of the guideline amendment. I disagree. There is simply no evidence to support the notion that an offender who received a guideline sentence is more dangerous than an offender who did not. *See United States v. Garcia-Uribe*, No. 1:08-cr-30039-PA-1, at 7 (D. Or. Oct. 6, 2015) (“But Defendant has not shown that prisoners who did not receive downward departures or variances are necessarily less deserving or more dangerous than those prisoners who did receive them.”). There are any number of reasons a judge may choose to impose a guidelines sentence having nothing to do with the offender’s danger to the public. *See, e.g., Rita v. United States*, 551 U.S. 338, 349 (2007) (the guidelines “reflect the fact that different judges (and others) can differ as to how best to reconcile the disparate ends of punishment”). Further, as the government notes, if the district court finds a defendant dangerous, it has discretion to deny the reduction; indeed, the application notes instruct courts to “consider the nature and seriousness of the danger to any person or the community that may be posed by a reduction[.]” U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10, Appl. Note 1(B)(ii).

Contrary to his position, Pulido-Aguilar’s case illustrates the Commission’s concerns regarding litigation and the need to avoid windfalls. If I granted Pulido-Aguilar the sentence reduction he requests based on the amended guideline, and incorporated the previous variance I gave him, he could be described as receiving undue consideration. Pulido-Aguilar’s original total offense level was 35, rendering a guideline range of 235-293. The government recommended a two-level variance—down to the guideline range he would be at today were he sentenced under the amended guidelines regime—in “recognition that the sentencing guidelines for drug cases are rather high” among other reasons. Gov’t Sent. Mem. 12 (ECF No. 76).

Defense counsel asked me to impose the statutory mandatory minimum of 120 months—1 month less than Pulido-Aguilar seeks by this motion—and I declined to do so. Instead, I calculated a sentence I thought was reasonable to address his individual circumstances.

In sum, the Commission has ensured the eligibility for a sentence reduction of those offenders who received a guideline sentence originally, while considering those who already received the benefit of a variance or departure as already adequately treated under the sentencing regime. *See Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 828 (Section 3582(c) “represents a congressional act of lenity intended to give prisoners the benefit of later enacted adjustments to the judgments reflected in the Guidelines.”). Under rational basis review, “[a] classification does not fail . . . because it is not made with mathematical nicety or because in practice it results in some inequality.” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114.

For these reasons, I reject Pulido-Aguilar’s equal protection challenge.

### CONCLUSION

I grant Pulido-Aguilar’s Motion for Reconsideration [97] and reissue the November 5, 2015 Opinion and Order without section III. For the reasons set forth above, I continue to deny Pulido-Aguilar’s Motion to Reduce Sentence [84].

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED this 19<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2015.

/s/ Garr M. King  
Garr M. King  
United States District Judge

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON**

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,**

v.

**JOSE CARRANZA GONZALEZ,**

Defendant.

Case No. 3:12-cr-0154-SI

**OPINION AND ORDER**

Billy J. Williams, Acting United States Attorney, Kemp L. Strickland, Assistant United States Attorney, United States Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon, 1000 S.W. Third Avenue, Suite 600, Portland, OR 97204. Of Attorneys for the United States.

Stephen R. Sady, Chief Deputy Defender, Elizabeth G. Daily and Bryan E. Lessley, Assistant Federal Public Defenders, Federal Public Defender's Office, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 1700, Portland, OR 97204. Of Attorneys for Defendant.

**Michael H. Simon, District Judge.**

Defendant Jose Carranza Gonzalez filed a motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) seeking a two-level reduction of his sentence based on United States Sentencing Guidelines ("Guidelines" or "U.S.S.G.") Amendment 782. The United States opposes this motion, arguing that Defendant is ineligible for a sentence reduction under Amendment 782 because Defendant's original sentence is lower than his amended guideline range and thus under the Sentencing Commission's policy statement U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10, Defendant is not eligible for a reduction. Defendant argues

PAGE 1 – OPINION AND ORDER



that the provisions of this policy statement contradict one another, are contrary to the Sentencing Commission's statutory directive, and violate the United States Constitution. Defendant further argues that under the doctrine of constitutional avoidance, the Court should interpret § 1B1.10 in a manner consistent with Defendant's interpretation. On November 20, 2015, the Court held oral argument on this motion and motions in two other cases asserting similar arguments.<sup>1</sup> For the reasons that follow, Defendant's motions are denied.

## STANDARDS

### A. Sentence Reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582

"A federal court generally 'may not modify a term of imprisonment once it has been imposed.'" *Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817, 819 (2010) (quoting 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)). Congress provided a narrow exception to that rule "in the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission." 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 825 (noting that "§ 3582(c)(2) does not authorize a sentencing or resentencing proceeding" but instead provides for the "'modif[ication of] a term of imprisonment' by giving courts the power to reduce an otherwise final sentence in circumstances specified by the Commission") (alteration in original). This authority to modify a previously-imposed prison sentence "represents a congressional act of lenity intended to give prisoners the benefit of later enacted adjustments to the judgments reflected in the Guidelines." *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 828.

Congress has given the Sentencing Commission a "substantial role . . . with respect to sentence-modification proceedings." *Id.* at 826. Congress has charged the Sentencing

---

<sup>1</sup> *United States v. Aleksander Gorbatenko*, Case No. 10-cr-0396-SI, and *United States v. Bernardo Contreras Guzman*, Case No. 12-cr-0291-SI. Defendant incorporated by reference the arguments asserted in *Guzman* and those arguments are addressed herein.

Commission “both with deciding whether to amend the Guidelines, and with determining whether and to what extent an amendment will be retroactive.” *Id.* (citation omitted); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 994(u) (“If the Commission reduces the term of imprisonment recommended in the guidelines applicable to a particular offense or category of offenses, it shall specify in what circumstances and by what amount the sentences of prisoners serving terms of imprisonment for the offense may be reduced.”). Thus, courts are “constrained by the Commission’s statements dictating ‘by what amount’ the sentence of a prisoner serving a term of imprisonment affected by the amendment ‘may be reduced.’” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826 (quoting 28 U.S.C. § 994(u)).

In § 3582(c), Congress specifically required that any sentence modification be “consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.” 18 U.S.C. §§ 3582(c)(1)(A)(ii), 3582(c)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 821 (“Any reduction [pursuant to § 3582(c)(2)] must be consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.”). The policy statement governing sentencing modifications after a retroactive amendment to the Guidelines instructs courts not to reduce a term of imprisonment if the amendment “does not have the effect of lowering the defendant’s applicable guideline range.” U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(a)(2)(B).

In deciding a motion under § 3582(c)(2), a court must follow a two-step process. “At step one, § 3582(c)(2) requires the court to follow the Commission’s instructions in § 1B1.10 to determine the prisoner’s eligibility for a sentence modification and the extent of the reduction authorized.” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827. This requires determining the amended guideline range, which is the range that would have been applicable to the defendant if the amendment had been in effect at the time of the defendant’s original sentencing. *Id.*; *see also* § 1B1.10(b)(1). In making this determination, courts are to substitute only the new amendment “for the

corresponding guideline provisions that were applied when the defendant was sentenced and shall leave all other guideline application decisions unaffected.” § 1B1.10(b)(1); *see also Dillon*, 860 U.S. at 827. The Sentencing Commission further limited application of a retroactive Guidelines amendment by instructing that a court cannot reduce a sentence “to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection,” with the exception of making a reduction that is comparable to what was made at the time of original sentencing as a result of “a government motion to reflect the defendant’s substantial assistance to authorities . . . .” § 1B1.10(b)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827 (discussing a previous version § 1B1.10(b)(2) that allowed a court to apply comparable departures and variances as were applied at the original sentencing and noting this instruction was “[c]onsistent with the limited nature of § 3582(c)(2) proceedings”). Step two of the § 3582(c) inquiry is to consider any applicable § 3553(a) factors and determine, in the discretion of the Court, whether any reduction authorized by the Guidelines amendment is warranted in whole or in part. *See Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827; 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A).

“This circumscribed inquiry [under § 3582(c)(2)] is not to be treated as a ‘plenary resentencing proceedings.’” *United States v. Navarro*, 800 F.3d 1104, 1110 (9th Cir. 2015) (quoting *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826). The appropriate use of sentence-modification under § 3582(c)(2) “‘is to adjust a sentence in light of a Guidelines amendment,’ so courts may not use such proceedings to ‘reconsider [] a sentence based on factors unrelated to a retroactive Guidelines amendment.’” *Id.* (quoting *United States v. Fox*, 631 F.3d 1128, 1132 (9th Cir. 2011)).

## **B. Equal Protection under the United States Constitution**

“When the Commission enacts Guidelines treating one class of offenders differently from another, equal protection generally requires that the classification be ‘rationally related to a

legitimate government interest.”<sup>2</sup> *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1113 (quoting *United States v. Ruiz-Chairez*, 493 F.3d 1089, 1091 (9th Cir. 2007)). If the classification implicates a fundamental right or a suspect classification, the Sentencing Commission’s decision would be subject to a higher level of scrutiny. *Id.* at 1113 n.7. Defendant argues that because his liberty is at stake, heightened scrutiny is appropriate. This argument, however, is foreclosed by the Ninth Circuit’s decision in *Navarro*, which noted that rational-basis review is generally applied when the Guidelines treat classes of offenders differently and applied rational-basis review in considering constitutional challenges to § 1B1.10. *Id.* at 1113. The Court is bound by this precedent.

A classification is rationally related to a legitimate government interest “if there is any *reasonably conceivable* state of facts that could provide a rational basis for the classification.” *FCC v. Beach Commc’ns, Inc.*, 508 U.S. 307, 313 (1993) (emphasis added). Under rational-basis review, the burden is on the party seeking to disprove the rationality of the relationship between the classification and the purpose, and that party must “negative every conceivable basis which might support” the classification “whether or not the basis has a foundation in the record.” *Heller v. Doe by Doe*, 509 U.S. 312, 320 (1993) (quotation marks and citations omitted). Thus, courts are to accept generalizations regarding the rational basis, “even when there is an imperfect fit between means and ends” and even if the classification “is not made with mathematical nicety or because in practice it results in some inequality.” *Id.* at 321 (quotation marks and citation omitted).

---

<sup>2</sup> As noted by the Ninth Circuit, the Guidelines technically are not governed by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which applies only to states, but the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment “similarly prohibits unjustified discrimination by federal actors” and the “approach to Fifth Amendment equal protection claims has always been precisely the same as to equal protection claims under the Fourteenth Amendment.” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1112 n.6 (quoting *Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld*, 420 U.S. 636, 638 n.2 (1975)).

## BACKGROUND

### A. History of Relevant Guidelines Amendments

In 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act (“FSA”) to “restore fairness to Federal cocaine sentencing.” Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-220, 124 Stat. 2372 (2010). Among other provisions, the FSA reduced the disparity between the amount of crack cocaine and powder cocaine needed to trigger mandatory minimum sentences and gave the Sentencing Commission the authority to amend the Guidelines to reflect the statute’s changes. *Id.* §§ 2, 8. Pursuant to this authority, in 2011 the Sentencing Commission promulgated Amendment 750, which, among other things, reduced base offense levels for certain crack-cocaine-related offenses. U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 750, Part A (2011). The Sentencing Commission gave Amendment 750 retroactive effect. U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 759 (2011).

In 2011, the Sentencing Commission also amended §1B1.10, its policy statement applicable to sentence reductions as a result of an amended guideline range. As relevant here, the Sentencing Commission amended §1B1.10(b)(2)(B), which provides the exceptions to § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A)’s general prohibition against reducing a sentence below the amended guideline range. The previous version stated:

Exception.—If the original term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing, a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection may be appropriate. However, if the original term of imprisonment constituted a non-guideline sentence determined pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) and *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005), a further reduction generally would not be appropriate.

U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (2010). This allowed defendants who received below-guidelines departures or variances at their original sentencing to receive a comparable reduction below the amended guideline range in a sentence-modification proceeding.

PAGE 6 – OPINION AND ORDER

The 2011 amended version of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) removed the sentence-modification judge's discretion to consider any variances or departures other than a departure for substantial assistance.<sup>3</sup> The amended version states:

Exception for Substantial Assistance.—If the term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing pursuant to a government motion to reflect the defendant's substantial assistance to authorities, a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection may be appropriate.

U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (2011). This is the version that is currently effective.

On November 1, 2014, the Sentencing Commission issued Amendment 782 to the Guidelines. U.S.S.G. Manual App'x C, Amend. 782 (2014). Amendment 782 reduces base offense levels by two for certain drug crimes, including the crimes of which Defendant was convicted. The Sentencing Commission also amended a portion of § 1B1.10, in a manner not relevant to this case.

#### **B. Defendant's Sentencing Information**

As relevant here, Defendant pled guilty to the crime of Possession With the Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine in violation of 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(a)(1) and (b)(1)(B)(viii). Defendant's original sentence was calculated from a base offense level of 36. Defendant received a two-level reduction for acceptance of responsibility (pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 3E.1.1(a)) and an additional one-level reduction pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 3E.1.1(b). This resulted in an adjusted offense level of 33. Defendant's criminal history category was IV, resulting in a guideline range of 188 to 235 months. Pursuant to Defendant's plea agreement, however, the government

---

<sup>3</sup> Departures other than a departure for substantial assistance are also referenced herein as "non-cooperation departures."

recommended a sentence of 72 months, and the Court granted a downward variance pursuant to § 3553(a) and sentenced Defendant to 72 months.

If Amendment 782 had been in effect, Defendant's base offense level would have been 34. Subtracting three levels for his adjustments, his amended adjusted offense level would have been 31. The next step is where the parties disagree. The government asserts that because § 1B1.10(b)(2) states that a sentence may not be further reduced except for a reduction based on substantial assistance, which does not apply in this case, under Amendment 782 Defendant's amended offense level is 31, with a corresponding guideline range of 151 to 188 months. Thus, concludes the government, because Defendant was originally sentenced to 72 months, which is "less than the minimum of the amended guideline range," § 1B1.10(b)(2) prohibits the Court from reducing Defendant's sentence.

Defendant argues that he should get full credit for his previously-imposed § 3553(a) variance. Defendant asserts that his variance was the equivalent of two months longer than the low-end of a 10-level downward variance. Defendant argues that applying a comparable variance to his amended offense level of 31 results in a sentence that is two months longer than the low end of level 21, criminal history category IV, which is 59 months.<sup>4</sup> Defendant moves to have his sentence reduced to 59 months.

### **DISCUSSION**

Defendant argues that in having his sentence modified under Amendment 782, he should continue to receive the benefit of the downward variances that were negotiated and agreed-upon in his plea agreement and applied by the Court in his original sentencing. Defendant asserts that the government's interpretation of § 1B1.10(b)(2) as requiring that courts may not apply

---

<sup>4</sup> Offense level 21 with criminal history category IV results in a Guidelines range of 57 to 71 months.

variances and non-cooperation departures in sentence-modification proceedings is unlawful because: (A) variances and departures are “guideline application decisions” that are specifically instructed to be left “unaffected” under § 1B1.10(b)(1) and are therefore included in calculating the “amended guideline range”; (B) the requirement as interpreted by the government is contrary to the Sentencing Commission’s statutory directive; (C) the requirement as interpreted by the government violates equal protection; and (D) under the doctrine of constitutional avoidance, if the Court finds “serious questions” as to the constitutionality of § 1B1.10(b)(2) as interpreted by the government, the Court should interpret the provision as including departures and variances, as interpreted by Defendant.

**A. Whether Variances and Departures are “Guideline Applications Decisions”**

Section 1B1.10(b)(1) instructs that when considering a sentence modification pursuant to a retroactive Guidelines change, the changed provision is incorporated and “all other guideline application decisions” are to remain unaffected. Defendant argues that variances and departures are “guideline application decisions” that must remain unaffected. Thus, argues Defendant, the government’s interpretation of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) to limit a court’s ability to reduce a sentence below the amended minimum guideline range after the applicable Guidelines amendment is applied is contrary to § 1B.10(b)(1)’s directive to keep all other “guideline application decisions” unaffected.

A “departure” is a divergence from the originally calculated sentence range based on a specific Guidelines departure provision, whereas a “variance” is a divergence from the Guidelines range based on an exercise of the Court’s discretion under § 3553(a). *See United States v. Fumo*, 655 F.3d 288, 317 (3d Cir. 2011), *as amended* (Sept. 15, 2011). Defendant argues that variances and departures are “guideline application decisions” and thus are required



to be applied after Amendment 782 is employed to lower the base offense level, resulting in an “amended guideline range” that includes the originally-applied departures and variances.

The phrases “guideline application decision” and “amended guideline range,” in isolation, may be ambiguous as to whether they include departures and variances. When considering the full text of § 1B1.10, its commentary, the text of its previous version, and applicable case law, however, it is evident that these phrases do not include variances and departures.

### **1. Text and context of current version of § 1B1.10**

The interpretation that departures and variances are not “guideline application decisions” and thus are not included in the “amended guideline range” is consistent with the text and context of § 1B1.10. If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions” that were part of the “amended guideline range,” then § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) would contain surplusage. Section 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) creates an exception allowing a reduction below the “amended guideline range” based on substantial assistance, as long as such a reduction was part of the original sentencing pursuant to a government motion. If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions” that had to remain unaffected under § 1B1.10(b)(1) and were therefore included in the “amended guideline range,” then there would be no need to create a specific exception to allow a reduction in a sentence-modification proceeding for substantial assistance. Under Defendant’s interpretation, the substantial assistance reduction would necessarily be included in the sentence modification as a “guideline application decision” and the exception created in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) would be superfluous, and arguably meaningless. Defendant’s interpretation is contrary to “the canon of construction that courts interpret statutes so as not to render any section meaningless.” *Meng Li v. Eddy*, 324 F.3d 1109, 1110 (9th Cir. 2003) (citing *Beck v. Prupis*, 529 U.S. 494, 506 (2000)); *see also United States v.*

PAGE 10 – OPINION AND ORDER

*Harrell*, 637 F.3d 1008, 1010-11 (9th Cir. 2011) (noting that courts must give effect to each word and “must ‘mak[e] every effort not to interpret a provision in a manner that renders other provisions of the same statute inconsistent, meaningless or superfluous’” (alteration in original) (quoting *United States v. Cabaccang*, 332 F.3d 622, 627 (9th Cir. 2003) (en banc))).

The government’s interpretation is also consistent with the Guidelines’ definition of “departure.” Under the Guidelines, “departure” is an “imposition of a sentence outside the applicable guideline range or of a sentence that is otherwise different from the guideline sentence.” U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.1, Application Note 1(E). The Supreme Court similarly has defined “departure” as creating a non-Guidelines sentence. *See Irizarry v. United States*, 553 U.S. 708, 714 (2008) (“‘Departure’ is a term of art under the Guidelines and refers only to non-Guidelines sentences imposed under the framework set out in the Guidelines.”).

Additionally, this interpretation is consistent with the commentary to § 1B1.10. The Guidelines commentary “is akin to an agency’s interpretation of its own legislative rules” and if it “does not violate the Constitution or a federal statute, it must be given ‘controlling weight unless it is plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation.’” *Stinson v. United States*, 508 U.S. 36, 45 (1993); *see also United States v. Vasquez-Cruz*, 692 F.3d 1001, 1006 (9th Cir. 2012) (quoting *Stinson* to support the proposition that “a change in the language of an applicable Guidelines provision, including a change in application notes or commentary, supersedes prior decisions applying earlier versions of that provision, just as we would be bound to apply the updated version of an agency rule or regulation”).

A court may only impose a sentence reduction that is consistent with the applicable Guidelines policy statement (here, § 1B1.10). 18 U.S.C. §§ 3582(c)(1)(A)(ii), 3582(c)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 821. Section 1B1.10(a) states that “[a] reduction in the defendant’s term

of imprisonment is not consistent with this policy statement and therefore is not authorized under 18 U.S.C. 3582(c)(2) if . . . [the amendment] does not have the effect of lowering the defendant's applicable guideline range." U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(a)(2). The Application Note of subsection (a) defines "applicable guideline range" as "the guideline range that . . . is determined before consideration of any departure provision in the Guidelines Manual or a variance."

U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10, cmt. n. 1(A). Although this commentary defines the phrase for purposes of § 1B1.10(a), the Court "detect[s] no reasoning that would overcome the presumption that the same definition applies when determining the 'applicable' Guidelines range for purposes of § 1B1.10(b)." *United States v. Steele*, 714 F.3d 751, 755, n.2 (2d Cir. 2013). Additionally, as discussed by the Second Circuit, the "amended guideline range" is simply the "applicable guideline range" after a retroactive amendment has been applied—there is the "applicable guideline range" at the time of the original sentencing and the "applicable guideline range" after the amendment is applied, and the phrase "amended guideline range" refers to the latter. *United States v. Montanez*, 717 F.3d 287, 293 (2d Cir. 2013). Accordingly "courts should use the same procedure to calculate both the applicable guideline range and the amended guideline range, departing from that procedure in the case of the amended guideline range only to 'substitute . . . the [relevant guideline] amendments.'" *Id.* (alteration in original) (quoting U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(1)). Thus, after considering the applicable retroactive amendment, the "amended guideline range" does not include departures or variances. *Id.* (noting that in determining the amended guideline range, courts should not consider any departures or variances).

Similarly, the Application Note of subsection (b)(2) is illustrative in demonstrating that departures and variances are not "guideline application decisions" that are part of the "amended guideline range." This Application Note provides examples of how the amended guideline range

is to be calculated. U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10, cmt. n. 3. The example discussing original sentences that were “outside the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing” because of downward departures or variances clarifies that such downward adjustments do not carry over into the new sentence that may be imposed pursuant to a retroactive Guidelines amendment. *Id.*

Finally, the commentary to Amendment 759, which enacted the 2011 amendments to § 1B1.10, explains that departures and variances are not included in the “applicable guideline range,” which means they are not included in the “amended guideline range.” The “Reason for Amendment” provided by the Sentencing Commission in promulgating the amendment explained that it issued the amendment, in part, to resolve a circuit split over whether the “applicable guideline range” includes any departures.<sup>5</sup> U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 759, Reason for Amendment, at 421 (2011). The Sentencing Commission noted that some circuits applied certain departures, particularly departures under § 4A1.3 (Departures Based on Inadequacy of Criminal History Category), in determining the applicable guideline range, whereas other circuits did not. *Id.* Thus, the amendment “amends Application Note 1 to clarify that the applicable guideline range referred to in § 1B1.10 is the guideline range determined pursuant to § 1B1.1(a), which is determined before consideration of *any* departure provision in the Guidelines Manual or *any* variance.” *Id.* (emphasis added). Defendant argues that this comment is irrelevant because the circuit split did not involve the issues raised in this case and instead involved departures under § 4A1.3. The amendment, however, was not constrained to that one departure, but was made more broadly to clarify that the “applicable guideline range” does not include *any* departures or *any* variances.

---

<sup>5</sup> Courts may properly rely on the Reason for Amendment to interpret an amendment. *See United States v. Boyd*, 721 F.3d 1259, 1263-64 (10th Cir. 2013).

The commentary's interpretation that "guideline application decisions" and "amended guideline range" do not include departures and variances is not plainly erroneous or contrary to the regulation, or, as discussed further below, unconstitutional or contrary to statute. Accordingly, it is given controlling weight.

## **2. Text and context of previous version of § 1B1.10**

The interpretation that departures and variances are not "guideline application decisions" that are included in the "amended guideline range" is further supported by considering the text and context of the previous version of § 1B1.10, before the 2011 amendment. Defendant's interpretation under this version of § 1B1.10 would again render certain provisions surplusage and arguably meaningless. The previous version contained the same provisions instructing courts to leave "guideline application decisions" unaffected in § 1B1.10(b)(1) and foreclosing the court from reducing a sentence to a term that is less than the minimum of the "amended guideline range" in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A). U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10 (2010). But the previous version had different text in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B), instructing that on modification, reductions comparable to original departures "may" be appropriate but that reductions comparable to original variances "generally would not be appropriate." U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (2010). Thus, under the previous version of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B), a court had the discretion in modifying a sentence to apply, or not to apply, departures or variances that had originally been applied. If departures and variances were "guideline application decisions" that were required to remain unaffected, then the court would have no need of the "discretion" to apply departures and variances because they already would need to be included, and the discretion not to apply them would run afoul of the directive to leave "guideline application decisions" unaffected. The fact that the current version of § 1B1.10(b)(2) removes the Court's discretion to consider variances and departures other than

for substantial assistance does not convert departures and variances into “guideline application decisions” that are part of the “amended guideline range.”

### 3. Case law

The Eleventh Circuit, in an unpublished opinion, recently considered and rejected the precise argument that Defendant makes here. *United States v. Pierce*, 616 F. App’x 410, 411 (11th Cir. 2015) (per curiam). The defendant in *Pierce* argued that “§ 1B1.10(b)(2) here nullifies what § 1B1.10(b)(1) requires to be left ‘unaffected’ because [the defendant] will not receive the benefit of a downward variance comparable to the one he received at his original sentencing.” *Id.* The Eleventh Circuit rejected this argument, finding that “the variance from which Pierce seeks to benefit and application of which was barred by § 1B1.10(b)(2) was not a ‘guideline application decision,’ as variances are imposed after the applicable guideline range is set.” *Id.*; *but see United States v. Shrewder*, 2015 WL 6123754, at \*1 (N.D. Ohio Oct. 16, 2015) (noting without analysis that “[i]n order to leave all other guideline application decisions unaffected, this Court applies the same enhancements and departures applied by [the original sentencing judge]”).

Other Circuits have also found that departures and variances are not a “guideline application decision” or are not to be included in the “amended guideline range.” *See, e.g., United States v. Hogan*, 722 F.3d 55, 60 (1st Cir. 2013) (“Thus, Application Note 1 prohibits courts from applying departures prior to the determination of the amended guideline range in a proceeding for a sentence reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2).”); *United States v. Boyd*, 721 F.3d 1259, 1260-64 (10th Cir. 2013) (analyzing the text and commentary of § 1B1.10 and associated provisions and concluding that a downward departure was not an “application decision” that remains “unaffected” but “is to be disregarded in calculating the defendant’s amended guideline range”); *Montanez*, 717 F.3d at 292 (analyzing the text of § 1B1.10 and its

PAGE 15 – OPINION AND ORDER

commentary and concluding “[c]onsequently, the ‘amended guideline range,’ as the ‘range that would have been applicable to the defendant’ had the relevant amendments been in effect, does not incorporate any departure a court previously granted under [the departure provision at issue in the case]”); *United States v. Valdez*, 492 F. App’x 895, 899 (10 Cir. 2012) (finding that the Application Notes to § 1B1.10 foreclose the argument that departures or variances are “guideline application decisions” because “they make it clear that the ‘guideline range’ affected by a § 3582(c)(2) proceeding is the range calculated *before* any departure or variance from the Guideline calculation” (emphasis in original)).

Although the Ninth Circuit has not yet directly considered whether departures and variances are “guideline application decisions,” it has determined that they are not included in the “applicable guideline range.” *See United States v. Pleasant*, 704 F.3d 808, 812 (9th Cir.) *cert. denied*, 134 S. Ct. 824 (2013) (“In short, Amendment 759 makes clear that the applicable guideline is derived pre-departure and pre-variance.”). If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions,” they would necessarily be included in the amended “applicable guideline range” (or “amended guideline range”). Thus, the Ninth Circuit’s conclusion that departures and variances are not included in the “applicable guideline range” forecloses the argument that they are “guideline application decisions” or that they should be included in the “amended guideline range.”

In considering the previous version of § 1B1.10, courts also found that application of original departures and variances is not required when modifying a sentence under § 3582(c)(2), and thus they are not “guideline application decisions” that must remain unaffected. *See, e.g., United States v. Vautier*, 144 F.3d 756, 761 (11th Cir. 1998) (holding that “a district court, ruling on a defendant’s § 3582(c)(2) motion, has the discretion to decide whether to re-apply a

downward departure for substantial assistance when considering what sentence the court would have imposed under the amended guideline. . . . Thus, whether to consider a downward departure in determining what sentence the court would have imposed under the amended guideline remains discretionary, and the court is not bound by its earlier decision at the original sentencing to depart downward from the sentencing guidelines range.”); *United States v. Wyatt*, 115 F.3d 606, 610 (8th Cir.1997) (“A discretionary decision to depart from the Guidelines range on the basis of substantial assistance made at the original time of sentencing is not a ‘guideline application decision’ that remains intact when the court considers the new Guideline range. The district court’s discretionary decision of whether to depart from the new amended Guidelines range based upon Wyatt’s prior substantial assistance is not dictated or mandated by either its prior decision to depart or by the extent of the prior departure . . . . The district court retains unfettered discretion to consider anew whether a departure from the new sentencing range is now warranted in light of the defendant’s prior substantial assistance.” (citation omitted)). This interpretation remains consistent with the current text of § 1B1.10.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Considering the text and context of § 1B1.10 and its commentary, court decisions interpreting the current and previous version of § 1B1.10, and the canons of constructions, the Court concludes that departures and variances are not “guideline application decisions” and are not included in the “amended guideline range.” Defendant’s arguments to the contrary are rejected.

#### **B. Whether §1B1.10(b)(2) Conflicts with the Sentencing Commission’s Statutory Directive**

Defendant also argues that §1B1.10(b)(2) conflicts with Sentencing Commission’s statutory directive in 28 U.S.C. § 991(b), which states:



(b) The purposes of the United States Sentencing Commission are to:

(1) establish sentencing policies and practices for the Federal criminal justice system that:

(A) assure the meeting of the purposes of sentencing as set forth in section 3553(a)(2) of title 18, United States Code;

(B) provide certainty and fairness in meeting the purposes of sentencing, avoiding unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar criminal conduct while maintaining sufficient flexibility to permit individualized sentences when warranted by mitigating or aggravating factors not taken into account in the establishment of general sentencing practices; and

(C) reflect, to the extent practicable, advancement in knowledge of human behavior as it relates to the criminal justice process . . . .

28 U.S.C. § 991(b). Defendant contends that by permitting courts to grant sentence reductions to people who did not receive variances and departures other than for substantial assistance but requiring courts to deny reductions to people who did receive such variances and departures, this provision nullifies the determinations previously made by the sentencing court and creates unwarranted disparities.

In *United States v. Tercero*, the Ninth Circuit considered whether § 1B1.10, and particularly its prohibition on consideration of variances and departures other than for substantial assistance, conflicted “with the purpose of the Guidelines . . . . to bring about an effective, fair sentencing system, with honest, uniform and *proportionate* sentences.” 734 F.3d 979, 983 (9th Cir. 2013) (quotation marks omitted) (emphasis added). The defendant in *Tercero* argued that § 1B1.10(b)(2) conflicted with this purpose because it precluded the district court from revising the defendant’s sentence to reflect the minor role she had played, which resulted in a downward departure at her original sentencing. The Ninth Circuit rejected this argument, finding that:

It is not in dispute, however, that when the district court originally sentenced Tercero, it *did* consider the sentencing factors set forth in § 3553(a). A motion brought under § 3582(c)(2) “does not authorize a sentencing or resentencing proceeding. Instead, it provides for the modification of a term of imprisonment by giving courts the power to ‘reduce’ an otherwise final sentence in circumstances specified by the Commission.” *Dillon*, 130 S.Ct. at 2690. “Section 3582(c)(2)’s text, together with its narrow scope, shows that Congress intended to authorize only a limited adjustment to an otherwise final sentence and not a plenary resentencing proceeding.” *Id.* at 2691. The procedural posture of this case makes it inappropriate for us to reweigh the sentencing factors set forth in § 3553(a) to assess the fairness of Tercero’s 70-month sentence.

*Id.* at 983 (emphasis in original). The court also emphasized that the Sentencing Commission has been given a substantial role with respect to sentence modifications, tasked with deciding whether to amend Guidelines and to what extent an amendment will be retroactive, and given “the power to issue policy statements to address, among other things, ‘the appropriate use of . . . the sentence modification provisions set forth in’ § 3582(c).” *Id.* (alteration in original) (quoting 18 U.S.C. § 994(a)(2)(C)). The Ninth Circuit thus concluded that “the revisions to § 1B1.10 fall squarely within the scope of Congress’s articulated role for the Commission.” *Id.* at 983-84.

The Court is bound by this Ninth Circuit precedent. Defendant attempts to distinguish *Tercero*, arguing that it analyzed whether § 1B1.10 conflicted with the purpose of the Guidelines, not whether § 1B1.10 conflicts with 28 U.S.C. § 991(b) and, particularly, its prohibition against sentencing disparities. The Court finds this to be a distinction without substantial difference. Although *Tercero* did not expressly cite to § 991(b), it analyzed, and rejected, the argument that § 1B1.10 conflicted “with the purpose of the Guidelines . . . .” *Id.*, at 983. The purposes of the Guidelines are directed by § 991(b), including the goal of eliminating sentencing disparity. *See, e.g., Dorsey v. United States*, 132 S. Ct. 2321, 2333 (2012) (citing and

quoting 28 U.S.C. § 991(b)(1)(B) for the proposition that “purposes of Guidelines-based sentencing include ‘avoiding unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar criminal conduct’”); *Chapman v. United States*, 500 U.S. 453, 473 (1991) (J. Stevens, dissenting) (noting that “one of the central purposes of the Sentencing Guidelines . . . was to eliminate disparity in sentencing”); *United States v. Banuelos-Rodriguez*, 215 F.3d 969, 983 (9th Cir. 2000) (“A central goal of the Sentencing Guidelines is to eliminate sentencing disparity. The purpose of the Sentencing Commission was to establish guidelines that ‘avoid[ ] unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar criminal conduct.’ 28 U.S.C. § 991(b)(1)(B).”). Thus, *Tercero*’s conclusion that § 1B1.10 does not conflict with the purpose of the Guidelines implies that § 1B1.10 does not conflict with § 991(b).

Additionally, whatever the label placed on it, the substance of the argument in *Tercero* was the same as Defendant raises here—that § 1B1.10(b)(2)’s prohibition on considering departures and variances results in unfair and disproportionate sentences. The Ninth Circuit’s reasoning in rejecting this argument was not based on the text of § 3553(a). The Ninth Circuit considered the broad power of the Sentencing Commission to establish sentence modification limitations, the limited scope of § 3582(c) proceedings, and the fact that at original sentencing a defendant received the benefit of consideration of all departures and variances in concluding that it is “inappropriate” for a court to “reweigh” the § 3553(a) factors in considering a sentence modification. That reasoning is equally applicable to Defendant’s argument that § 1B1.10(b)(2) conflicts with § 991(b).

Based on binding Ninth Circuit precedent, the Court finds that the limitation in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) precluding consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures in the

context of a sentence modification under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c) does not conflict with 18 U.S.C. § 991(b).

### **C. Whether the Policy Statement Violates Equal Protection**

The previous version of § 1B1.10(b)(2) gave courts considering a sentence reduction the discretion to impose variances and departures comparable to those that were imposed during the original sentencing. U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2) (2010). The current version of § 1B1.10(b)(2) eliminates this discretion and prohibits a court from reducing sentences based on previously-imposed variances and non-cooperation departures. Defendant argues that this creates two classes of persons—those who did not originally receive any variances or non-cooperation departures and thus are eligible for a reduction, and those whose eligibility for a reduction is constrained because they originally received variances or non-cooperation departures. Defendant argues that there is no rational purpose for distinguishing between these two classes and no rational relationship between prohibiting consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures and a legitimate government purpose. As stated above, rational-basis review is quite narrow and Defendant faces a heavy burden to disprove the rationality of the relationship between the change to § 1B1.10(b)(2) and any “reasonably conceivable” rational basis.

Defendant argues that the classification in § 1B1.10(b) is analogous to classifications that have been held to violate equal protection, such as classifications granting presentence credits to persons convicted of crimes with a statutory minimum and denying those credits to persons convicted of crimes that do not carry a statutory minimum (*Dunn v. United States*, 376 F.2d 191 (4th Cir. 1967) and *Myers v. United States*, 446 F.2d 232 (9th Cir. 1971)) and classifications granting presentence credits to adults but not juveniles (*Jonah R. v. Carmona*, 446 F.3d 1000 (9th Cir. 2006)). These cases are distinguishable.

The cases involving presentence credits being given for crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence but not for crimes without a mandatory minimum are distinguishable for several reasons. First, it is a reasonable assumption that crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence are more serious than crimes that do not have a mandatory minimum. *See Dunn*, 376 F.2d at 193-94 (noting that it “would be an arbitrary discrimination to credit a defendant with presentence custody upon conviction of an offense of a magnitude requiring the imposition of a minimum mandatory sentence, but to withhold such credit when the offense is not so grave as to require a minimum term of imprisonment”). Although Defendant argues that members of the class of inmates who did not receive any departures or variances are “more dangerous” and “less deserving” of a reduction, Defendant has not shown that offenders who did not receive downward departures or variances are necessarily more dangerous or less deserving than offenders who did receive such departures and variances. The Court declines to so broadly paint the entire class. Departures and variances are given for many different reasons and are not necessarily an indication that an offender is less dangerous than an offender who did not receive a departure or variance.

Defendant also fails to prove that offenders convicted of only the most “grave” offenses will receive the benefit of retroactive sentence reductions. Persons convicted of “grave” offenses may have received departures or variances that render them ineligible for a reduction under Amendment 782, whereas persons convicted of lesser crimes may not have received any departures or variances, rendering them eligible.

Second, the provision of presentence credits to offenders convicted of crimes with mandatory minimum sentences was required under the applicable statute and was automatic. *See Dunn*, 376 F.2d at 193 (“Denial of [presentence custody] credit . . . where others guilty of crimes

of the same or greater magnitude *automatically* receive credit, would entail an arbitrary discrimination within the power and hence the duty of the court to avoid.” (emphasis added)). Here, whether to allow a sentence reduction, even to those inmates who qualify under § 1B1.10, is a discretionary decision made by the judge considering the sentence reduction.

Third, the interpretation that the statute prohibited presentence credits to any offenders other than those convicted of a crime with a mandatory minimum sentence was a constrained reading of the statute. The statute was enacted because although it was the uniform practice of courts to allow presentence credits to offenders convicted of crimes that did not have a mandatory minimum sentence, some courts prohibited such credits to offenders who were convicted of crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence because those courts were concerned allowing such credits would conflict with the statutory minimum. *See id.* at 193. Accordingly, Congress enacted a statute clarifying that presentence credits were to be given to offenders convicted of crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence. *Id.* This was intended to expand the availability of presentence credits to offenders convicted of crimes with mandatory minimum sentences, not to flip the situation so that such offenders were the only persons eligible for presentence credits while offenders who previously had uniformly been receiving the credits were no longer eligible. *Id.* No such strained interpretation is present in this case. The Sentencing Commission’s decision to remove any consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures was “careful and deliberate.” *Hogan*, 722 F.3d at 61.

Finally, Defendant and other offenders who received departures and variances have not been precluded from receiving the benefit of those departures and variances. They received full consideration of all possible departures and variances at the time of his original sentencing and the benefit of any that were granted to them. Sentence-modification proceedings are not “plenary

resentencing proceeding[s].” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826. The fact that this class of offenders will not receive the benefit of comparable departures and variances in a resentencing proceeding does not detract from the fact that they already received that benefit in a lower original sentence. *See United States v. Berberena*, 694 F.3d 514, 521 (3d Cir. 2012) (“Rather than undo the effect of previous departures and variances, the Commission has merely limited the extent to which new ones can be awarded in § 3582(c)(2) proceedings.”).

*Jonah R.* is similarly distinguishable. That case turned on statutory interpretation, looking at the statute on presentence credits, the Federal Juvenile Delinquency Act, and the Youth Corrections Act to determine whether juveniles were eligible for presentence credits. 446 F.3d at 1103-05. After the federal District Court in the U.S. Virgin Island held that juveniles were not entitled to presentence credits, the Bureau of Prisons had changed its policy interpreting the relevant statutes as not permitting juveniles to receive presentence credits. *Id.* at 1002-03. The Ninth Circuit noted that it was not giving the ordinary “substantial deference” to the Bureau’s interpretation because the agency did not argue for it, the revised interpretation contradicted previous interpretations, and the revised interpretation was based on a court case and not on agency expertise. *Id.* at 1006. The Ninth Circuit then determined whether juveniles were entitled to presentence credits by looking at the text, context, purpose, and legislative history of the relevant statutes. *Id.* at 1006-11. The Ninth Circuit also discussed a related statute that requires that presentence credit to be given to juvenile offenders convicted abroad and transferred to an American detention facility. *Id.* at 1007-08. The court then noted that “[i]t strains credulity . . . to think that Congress would intend to deal more harshly with juveniles unlucky enough to be arrested in the United States” and that “disparate treatment [of this sort] might well trigger equal protection concerns.” Thus, the equal protection concern in *Jonah R.* was that juveniles who

were arrested in the United States would not receive presentence credit, while juveniles arrested abroad would receive such credit. This type of concern is not present here. There is no geographic disparity or other similar, irrational basis for distinguishing which offenders will be eligible for a reduction.

Defendant also argues that revised § 1B1.10(b)(2) creates irrational results.<sup>6</sup> Defendant offers the following scenario: Two defendants are convicted of the same crime, have similar

---

<sup>6</sup> Defendant relies on *Mellouli v. Lynch*, 135 S.Ct. 1980 (2015), to argue that these irrational results demonstrate that § 1B1.10(b) fails under rational-basis review. *Mellouli* did not involve an equal protection claim, but analyzed whether a misdemeanor conviction under a Kansas law prohibiting drug paraphernalia triggered deportation under 8 U.S.C. § 1227(a)(2)(B)(i). *Id.* at 1983-84. In 2009, the Bureau of Immigration Appeals (“BIA”) had announced an interpretation of the relevant statutes that held that although state-law convictions for drug possession or distribution required the conviction be based on a federally-controlled substance under 21 U.S.C. § 802, drug paraphernalia offenses relate to the drug trade in general and thus need not be proven to be paraphernalia related to a substance listed under § 802. *Id.* at 1988. The Supreme Court found that this “disparate approach to state drug convictions” had “no home in the text of § 1227(a)(2)(B)(i),” led “to consequences Congress could not have intended,” and arose from the BIA’s “conflicting positions on the meaning of § 1227(a)(2)(B)(i),” which caused “the anomalous result that minor paraphernalia possession offenses are treated more harshly than drug possession and distribution offenses.” *Id.* at 1989. The Supreme Court noted that it made “scant sense” that paraphernalia possession, “an offense less grave than drug possession and distribution,” triggered removal regardless of whether the offense implicated a federally controlled substance, while the more serious crimes of drug possession and distribution only triggered removal if they implicated a federally-controlled substance. *Id.* (“The incongruous upshot is that an alien is *not* removable for *possessing* a substance controlled only under Kansas law, but he *is* removable for using a sock to contain that substance.”). Based on its finding that BIA’s interpretation made little sense, the Supreme Court held that the interpretation “is owed no deference under the doctrine described in *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 843 (1984).” *Id.*

*Mellouli* is distinguishable from the case at bar. Unlike the BIA action in that case, the Sentencing Commission here does not have conflicting policy statements on this issue, made a deliberate decision to eliminate a court’s discretion to apply variances and non-cooperation departures during a sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2) based on stated concerns, and made the decision pursuant to the express grant of authority under 28 U.S.C. § 994(u), to “specify in what circumstances and by what amount the sentences of prisoners serving terms of imprisonment for the offense may be reduced.” Further, § 1B1.10 does not create a result not intended by the Sentencing Commission or by Congress. Additionally, *Mellouli* was not



criminal histories, and have identical guideline ranges; Defendant A is originally sentenced to a below-guidelines sentence, receiving a two-level downward variance because the judge found that Defendant A's history and characteristics warranted a lighter sentence; Defendant B is sentenced to the guidelines range because the judge determined a longer sentence was necessary to carry out the purposes of § 3553(a). In a §3582(c) sentence-modification proceeding, Defendant A is not eligible for an adjustment under § 1B1.10(b)(2) and Defendant B is, resulting in Defendant B receiving a two-level downward adjustment and ultimately receiving the same sentence as Defendant A, despite the original sentencing judge's belief that Defendant B deserved a longer sentence than Defendant A.

This scenario, however, does not demonstrate that prohibiting consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures fails rational-basis review. First, it is important to acknowledge that application of a sentence reduction pursuant to a retroactive Guidelines amendment is discretionary. It is therefore possible that a judge considering a reduction for Defendant B would not apply the sentence reduction, believing the original longer sentence is sufficient but not greater than necessary to carry out the purposes of § 3553(a). If that were the case, then there would be no unwarranted disparity between Defendants A and B.

Second, even if offenders such as Defendant B would have benefitted from Amendment 782 and would have received modified sentences that are no longer proportionally longer than the "less culpable" co-defendants, that result does not prove an equal protection violation under rational-basis review. Defendant's burden under rational-basis review is to show that there is no reasonably conceivable set of facts that could provide a rational basis for the Sentencing Commission's classification of persons eligible for a sentence reduction, not that

---

analyzing agency action under a rational-basis review, but was interpreting a statute and determining whether an agency's interpretation was entitled to deference.

there is a possible set of facts that show a potentially irrational result from that classification. *See Heller*, 509 U.S. at 320-21 (noting that the party challenging a classification must “negative every conceivable basis which might support it” and that a classification survives rational-basis review even if “in practice it results in some inequality”) (quotation marks omitted).

The Sentencing Commission provided two general reasons for making the change and creating the new classification of persons eligible for a reduction.<sup>7</sup> First, the Sentencing Commission noted that the previous version of the policy statement’s distinction between *departures*, which “may” be appropriate to apply when reducing a sentence, and *variances*, which would “generally not” be appropriate to apply when reducing a sentence was difficult to apply and prompted litigation. The Sentencing Commission believed that a single limitation that prohibits consideration of both variances and departures, except for substantial assistance departures, “further[s] the need to avoid unwarranted sentencing disparities and avoids litigation. . . . [and] promotes conformity with the amended guideline range and avoids undue complexity and litigation.” U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 759, Reason for Amendment, at 420 (2011). Second, the Sentencing Commission was “concerned that retroactively amending the guidelines could result in a windfall for defendants who had already received a departure or variance, especially one that took into account the disparity in treatment between powder and crack cocaine . . . .” *United States v. Davis*, 739 F.3d 1222, 1225 (9th Cir. 2014). Defendant

---

<sup>7</sup> As noted in *Navarro*, “under rational-basis review, the government actor generally need not ‘actually articulate at any time the purpose or rationale supporting its classification.’” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1113 n.8 (quoting *Armour v. City of Indianapolis, Ind.*, --- U.S. ---, 132 S.Ct. 2073, 2082 (2012)). As the Ninth Circuit did in *Navarro*, the Court here focuses on the governmental interests articulated by the Sentencing Commission because they are most easily addressed. For the reasons stated in Defendant’s reply brief, however, the Court is not persuaded that the other purpose suggested in the government’s brief, the need to avoid geographic disparities in sentencing, survives a rational-basis review.

argues that neither of these concerns rationally justify limiting sentence reductions for defendants with variances and non-cooperation downward departures.

**1. Reducing complexity, litigation, and disparities and promoting conformity**

Defendant argues that the amended policy statement does not avoid undue complexity, litigation, or unwarranted disparity, and, to the contrary, creates more problems. Although the former version made a distinction between departures and variances, it left the application of both to the discretion of the judge. It also preserved the option of applying the original § 3553(a) factors. This approach, Defendant argues, promoted fairness and uniformity and avoided unwarranted disparity. The revised version, argues Defendant, increases the likelihood of litigation by purporting to remove the judge's discretion to apply comparable variances and non-cooperation departures and increases the risk of undue sentencing disparity by overriding many of the individualized decisions made by the original sentencing court after full analysis of the § 3553(a) factors.

Defendant has not met his burden to refute every “reasonably conceivable” basis that might support the Sentencing Commission’s decision that eliminating all variances and non-cooperation departures avoids undue complexity and litigation. Although some litigation may be generated challenging the lawfulness of the policy statement, the actual application of the policy statement is straightforward. No variances or non-cooperation departures are permitted, rendering the modification calculation a relatively simple exercise. The Sentencing Commission’s conclusion that eliminating variances and non-cooperation departures made sentencing modifications less complex and thereby would reduce litigation survives rational-bases review.

Additionally, the Sentencing Commission’s conclusion that eliminating variances and non-cooperation departures would promote uniformity with the amended guideline range also

survives review. Without departures and variances, the modified sentence necessarily will fall within the amended guideline range.

Regarding the objective of reducing disparity in sentences, although removing the option to consider any § 3553(a) factors or non-cooperation departures may result in some disparity in sentences, Defendant has not shown that there are no “reasonably conceivable state of facts” in which the amended policy statement reduces sentence disparity. *Beach Commc’ns*, 508 U.S. at 313. The question is not whether the policy statement is the best method or wisest policy for addressing the government’s concern, but whether there is a rational connection between the Sentencing Commission’s concern and the decision to preclude application of any variances or non-cooperation departures. It was rational for the Sentencing Commission to be concerned that retroactive Guidelines amendments may not be imposed uniformly. Although the Court recognizes that some disparities in sentencing will likely result from this policy statement, the Court is constrained by the scope of rational-basis review. It cannot be said that constraining the discretion of judges’ to apply variances and non-cooperation departures has no rational connection to addressing the Sentencing Commission’s concern regarding disparate sentences.

## **2. Concern relating to “windfall” sentences upon modification**

Defendant also argues that public testimony and statistical evidence show that the Sentencing Commission’s “windfall” concern was unfounded. Defendant notes that the public testimony revealed that in general defendants would not get “windfalls” because judges had discretion in modifying a sentence to apply comparable departures and variances, and those judges who had originally varied from the guidelines range for policy reasons relating to the difference between powder and crack cocaine could deny any further sentence reduction. Defendant specifically points to testimony from the representative of the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) commenting that judges depart for policy reasons to a small degree in “a very

PAGE 29 – OPINION AND ORDER

narrow class of cases” and that the DOJ would not object to sentence reductions in other types of cases such as departures for overstated criminal history or variances for medical or mental health conditions. Def’ts Reply Br., Dkt. 66 at 8 (citing Tr. of Pub. Hr’g Before the U.S. Sentencing Comm’n at 49-52, 59-60, 61-62, 93, 101-12 (June 1, 2011)). Defendant further argues that even if such “windfalls” had been a problem, eliminating all reductions for variances and non-cooperation departures is not rationally related to that limited concern.

Under rational-basis review, the government’s basis need not have a foundation in the record. *Heller*, 509 U.S. at 320; *see also Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114 (noting that the defendant’s argument that there was insufficient evidence before the Sentencing Commission to conclude that Amendment 788’s one-year delay was necessary before implementing Amendment 782 “misapprehends the scope of rational-basis review. Generally, ‘the absence of legislative facts explaining the distinction on the record has no significance in rational-basis analysis.’” (quoting *Beach Commc’ns*, 508 U.S. at 315)). In fact, “rational-basis review allows for decisions ‘based on rational speculation unsupported by evidence or empirical data.’” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114 (quoting *Beach Commc’ns*, 508 U.S. at 315).

Here, the Sentencing Commission’s speculation that some offenders may have received a departure or variance to *de facto* adjust for a judge’s belief that the crack cocaine drug guidelines were too high was rational. Eliminating consideration of all variances and non-cooperation reductions has some “rational connection” to this government interest.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, with respect to

---

<sup>8</sup> The Court shares the concern articulated by the Second Circuit, which questioned as a policy matter the Sentencing Commission’s decision to address the “windfall” problem by completely eliminating a court’s discretion to give the benefit of previously-applied departures and variances during sentencing reduction proceedings. *Montanez*, 717 F.3d at 294. The Second Circuit noted that the “policy adopted in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) sweeps much more broadly [than the windfall concern], affecting even defendants . . . who benefitted from departures that were unrelated to prior versions of the crack-cocaine guidelines.” *Id.* But as recognized by the Second

Amendment 782, the Sentencing Commission could rationally speculate that some offenders may have received a departure or variance to adjust for a judge's belief that the drug guidelines were too high. This is all that is needed under rational-basis review, "regardless of whether [the policy statement] is an 'exact fit' for the interest at issue" or "is an imperfect fit between means and ends." *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114. Although the Sentencing Commission's reasoning in eliminating all variances and non-cooperation departures will apply with greater force to those offenders who received variances and departures to adjust for the perceived unfairness of the drug guidelines than to those offenders who received variances and departures for other reasons, this fact alone does not render the decision constitutionally-deficient. *See id.* ("The fact that the Commission's reasoning will apply with greater force to some groups of inmates than to others does not invalidate its otherwise-valid decision.").

#### **D. Constitutional Avoidance**

Defendant's final argument is that the Court need not resolve the equal protection challenge and strike §1B1.10's prohibition against consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures, but can instead apply the doctrine of constitutional avoidance. Defendant argues that he has raised "serious questions" regarding the constitutionality of interpreting § 1B1.10 as prohibiting consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures, and thus the Court should apply the doctrine of constitutional avoidance and interpret the policy statement so as to avoid these constitutional implications. Defendant argues this can be done by interpreting the term "amended guidelines range" to include previously-imposed variations and departures. Because the Court has not found a constitutional violation and does not find, under rational-basis

---

Circuit, "Congress has given the Commission the authority to resolve these policy questions." *Id.* Although the Sentencing Commission may have used a broad approach to address its "windfall" concern, Defendant has not shown that this approach does not have any rational connection to addressing potential "windfall" situations.

review, that serious questions arise regarding the constitutionality of § 1B1.10's prohibition on considering variances and non-cooperation departures, the Court declines to apply the doctrine of constitutional avoidance.

**CONCLUSION**

Defendant's motion (Dkt. 55) to reduce his sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) is DENIED.

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

DATED this 2nd day of December, 2015.

/s/ Michael H. Simon  
Michael H. Simon  
United States District Judge

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Case No. 6:11-cr-60135-AA

Plaintiff,

OPINION AND ORDER

v.

EDUARDO BOCANEGRA-MOSQUEDA,

Defendant.

---

AIKEN, Chief Judge:

Defendant seeks a reduction of sentence pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and Amendment 782 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines (USSG). Defendant's motion is denied.

**DISCUSSION**

On June 19, 2013, defendant was convicted of possession with intent to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. Under the USSG, his total offense level (after reductions for safety valve



and acceptance of responsibility) was 29 and his criminal history category was I, resulting in a guideline sentencing range of 87 to 108 months. However, the court granted defendant's request for a sentence outside the advisory guideline range and imposed a sentence of 70 months; this sentence corresponds with an offense level of either 26 or 27.

Amendment 782 reduces most base offense levels on the § 2D1.1 Drug Quantity Table by two levels, and Amendment 788 authorized retroactive application of Amendment 782. Application of Amendment 782 reduces defendant's total offense level from 29 to 27, with an amended guideline range of 70 to 87 months. Defendant argues that he is eligible for an additional two-level reduction to account for the downward variance the court allowed at sentencing. With an additional two-level reduction, defendant's offense level would be 25 and the guideline sentencing range would be 57 to 71 months. Defendant requests a sentence of 57 months.

The government opposes defendant's motion, because his 70-month original sentence is already at the low end of the amended guideline range of 70-87 months. Under USSG § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A), "the court shall not reduce the defendant's term of imprisonment under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and this policy statement to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection." USSG § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A); see also id. at n. 3. Under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2), a reduction in

sentence is permitted only when "such a reduction is consistent with the applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission." See also Dillon v. United States, 560 U.S. 817, 819 (2010) ("Any reduction must be consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission."). Thus, defendant's request is inconsistent with USSG § 1B1.10(b)(2), and the court lacks the authority to grant the reduction in sentence sought by defendant. See United States v. Parker, 617 Fed. Appx. 806 (9th Cir. Sept. 25, 2015) ("The district court properly concluded that Parker is ineligible for a sentence reduction because her sentence is already below the amended Guidelines range, and the government did not file a motion for substantial assistance.")<sup>1</sup>; United States v. Munguia Diaz, 606 Fed. Appx. 385, 386 (9th Cir. June 30, 2015) ("Because Munguia-Diaz's 144-month sentence is lower than the bottom of the new sentencing range, he is not eligible for a reduction.").

Defendant nevertheless argues that § 1B1.10(b)(2) violates the Equal Protection Clause by denying defendants who received downward variances from obtaining the benefit of Amendment 782, thus treating them differently from defendants who did not receive downward variances. Defendant argues that no rational basis supports this distinction, as the Sentencing Commission is essentially allowing "more dangerous and less deserving" offenders

---

<sup>1</sup> Defendant's request does not does not fall under the substantial assistance exception. USSG § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B).

to gain the "full" benefit of Amendment 782. Def.'s Mem. 12-13 (doc. 48). I disagree.

Defendant's argument rests on two presumptions, neither of which is accurate or supported by the record. First, defendant assumes that all other defendants who did not receive downward variances at their original sentencing hearings are "more dangerous and less deserving" than defendants who did. However, defendant presents no evidence or data to support this rather broad assertion; indeed, many factors may influence a judge's decision to impose a downward variance, including the circumstances and seriousness of the offense, adequate deterrence, and the need for education training, medical care, or other treatment. See 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a). Second, defendant's argument and ultimate request for 57 months assumes that the court would have granted the exact same downward variance had defendant's total offense level been 27 instead of 29 at the time of sentencing, an assumption that is not necessarily accurate.

Regardless, however, defendant's Equal Protection argument fails for the simple reason that a rational basis exists to support the policy articulated in § 1B1.10(b). See United States v. Navarro, 800 F.3d 1104, 1113 (9th Cir. 2015) ("When the Commission enacts Guidelines treating one class of offenders differently from another, equal protection generally requires that the classification be "rationally related to a legitimate government

interest." ).<sup>2</sup> Here, the reasons underlying § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) - avoiding undue litigation and complexity, promoting uniformity in sentencing, and preventing an unintended windfall to defendants - survives rational basis scrutiny. United States v. Davis, 739 F.3d 1222, 1226 (9th Cir. 2014) (explaining reasons underlying § 1B1.10(b) when upholding the Sentencing Commission's authority to implement it). I find nothing unconstitutional about the Sentencing Commission's policy.

Accordingly, defendant's amended motion for reduction of sentence (doc. 40) is DENIED.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated this 11<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2015.

  
Ann Aiken  
United States District Judge

---

<sup>2</sup>I find that the appropriate level of scrutiny is rational basis; defendant does not have a fundamental right to a lower sentence in this circumstance and he does not identify a suspect classification. Dillon, 560 U.S. at 828; United States v. Johnson, 626 F.3d 1085, 1088 (9th Cir. 2010) (applying rational basis standard "to equal protection challenges to the Sentencing Guidelines based on a comparison of allegedly disparate sentences").

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON**

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,**

**v.**

**ALEKSANDER GORBATENKO,**

Defendant.

Case No. 3:10-cr-0396-SI

**OPINION AND ORDER**

Billy J. Williams, Acting United States Attorney, Jeffrey S. Sweet, Assistant United States Attorney, United States Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon, 405 East 8th Avenue, Suite 2400, Eugene, OR 97401. Of Attorneys for the United States.

Rosalind M. Lee, ROSALIND MANSON LEE, LLC, 245 East 4th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401. Of Attorneys for Defendant.

**Michael H. Simon, District Judge.**

Defendant Aleksander Gorbatenko filed a motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) seeking a two-level reduction of his sentence based on United States Sentencing Guidelines ("Guidelines" or "U.S.S.G.") Amendment 782. The United States opposes this motion, arguing that Defendant is ineligible for a sentence reduction under Amendment 782 because Defendant's original sentence is lower than his amended guideline range and thus under the Sentencing Commission's policy statement U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10, Defendant is not eligible for a reduction. Defendant argues

PAGE 1 – OPINION AND ORDER

that the provisions of this policy statement contradict one another, are contrary to the Sentencing Commission's statutory directive, and violate the United States Constitution. Defendant further argues that under the doctrine of constitutional avoidance, the Court should interpret § 1B1.10 in a manner consistent with Defendant's interpretation. On November 20, 2015, the Court held oral argument on this motion and motions in two other cases asserting similar arguments.<sup>1</sup> For the reasons that follow, Defendant's motions are denied.

## STANDARDS

### A. Sentence Reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582

"A federal court generally 'may not modify a term of imprisonment once it has been imposed.'" *Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817, 819 (2010) (quoting 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)). Congress provided a narrow exception to that rule "in the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission." 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 825 (noting that "§ 3582(c)(2) does not authorize a sentencing or resentencing proceeding" but instead provides for the "'modif[ication of] a term of imprisonment' by giving courts the power to reduce an otherwise final sentence in circumstances specified by the Commission") (alteration in original). This authority to modify a previously-imposed prison sentence "represents a congressional act of lenity intended to give prisoners the benefit of later enacted adjustments to the judgments reflected in the Guidelines." *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 828.

Congress has given the Sentencing Commission a "substantial role . . . with respect to sentence-modification proceedings." *Id.* at 826. Congress has charged the Sentencing

---

<sup>1</sup> *United States v. Jose Carranza Gonzalez*, Case No. 12-cr-0154-SI, and *United States v. Bernardo Contreras Guzman*, Case No. 12-cr-0291-SI. Defendant incorporated by reference the arguments asserted in *Guzman* and those arguments are addressed herein.

Commission “both with deciding whether to amend the Guidelines, and with determining whether and to what extent an amendment will be retroactive.” *Id.* (citation omitted); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 994(u) (“If the Commission reduces the term of imprisonment recommended in the guidelines applicable to a particular offense or category of offenses, it shall specify in what circumstances and by what amount the sentences of prisoners serving terms of imprisonment for the offense may be reduced.”). Thus, courts are “constrained by the Commission’s statements dictating ‘by what amount’ the sentence of a prisoner serving a term of imprisonment affected by the amendment ‘may be reduced.’” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826 (quoting 28 U.S.C. § 994(u)).

In § 3582(c), Congress specifically required that any sentence modification be “consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.” 18 U.S.C. §§ 3582(c)(1)(A)(ii), 3582(c)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 821 (“Any reduction [pursuant to § 3582(c)(2)] must be consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.”). The policy statement governing sentencing modifications after a retroactive amendment to the Guidelines instructs courts not to reduce a term of imprisonment if the amendment “does not have the effect of lowering the defendant’s applicable guideline range.” U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(a)(2)(B).

In deciding a motion under § 3582(c)(2), a court must follow a two-step process. “At step one, § 3582(c)(2) requires the court to follow the Commission’s instructions in § 1B1.10 to determine the prisoner’s eligibility for a sentence modification and the extent of the reduction authorized.” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827. This requires determining the amended guideline range, which is the range that would have been applicable to the defendant if the amendment had been in effect at the time of the defendant’s original sentencing. *Id.*; *see also* § 1B1.10(b)(1). In making this determination, courts are to substitute only the new amendment “for the

corresponding guideline provisions that were applied when the defendant was sentenced and shall leave all other guideline application decisions unaffected.” § 1B1.10(b)(1); *see also Dillon*, 860 U.S. at 827. The Sentencing Commission further limited application of a retroactive Guidelines amendment by instructing that a court cannot reduce a sentence “to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection,” with the exception of making a reduction that is comparable to what was made at the time of original sentencing as a result of “a government motion to reflect the defendant’s substantial assistance to authorities . . . .” § 1B1.10(b)(2); *see also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827 (discussing a previous version § 1B1.10(b)(2) that allowed a court to apply comparable departures and variances as were applied at the original sentencing and noting this instruction was “[c]onsistent with the limited nature of § 3582(c)(2) proceedings”). Step two of the § 3582(c) inquiry is to consider any applicable § 3553(a) factors and determine, in the discretion of the Court, whether any reduction authorized by the Guidelines amendment is warranted in whole or in part. *See Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 827; 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A).

“This circumscribed inquiry [under § 3582(c)(2)] is not to be treated as a ‘plenary resentencing proceedings.’” *United States v. Navarro*, 800 F.3d 1104, 1110 (9th Cir. 2015) (quoting *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826). The appropriate use of sentence-modification under § 3582(c)(2) “‘is to adjust a sentence in light of a Guidelines amendment,’ so courts may not use such proceedings to ‘reconsider [] a sentence based on factors unrelated to a retroactive Guidelines amendment.’” *Id.* (quoting *United States v. Fox*, 631 F.3d 1128, 1132 (9th Cir. 2011)).

## **B. Equal Protection under the United States Constitution**

“When the Commission enacts Guidelines treating one class of offenders differently from another, equal protection generally requires that the classification be ‘rationally related to a



legitimate government interest.”<sup>2</sup> *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1113 (quoting *United States v. Ruiz-Chairez*, 493 F.3d 1089, 1091 (9th Cir. 2007)). If the classification implicates a fundamental right or a suspect classification, the Sentencing Commission’s decision would be subject to a higher level of scrutiny. *Id.* at 1113 n.7. Defendant argues that because his liberty is at stake, heightened scrutiny is appropriate. This argument, however, is foreclosed by the Ninth Circuit’s decision in *Navarro*, which noted that rational-basis review is generally applied when the Guidelines treat classes of offenders differently and applied rational-basis review in considering constitutional challenges to § 1B1.10. *Id.* at 1113. The Court is bound by this precedent.

A classification is rationally related to a legitimate government interest “if there is any *reasonably conceivable* state of facts that could provide a rational basis for the classification.” *FCC v. Beach Commc’ns, Inc.*, 508 U.S. 307, 313 (1993) (emphasis added). Under rational-basis review, the burden is on the party seeking to disprove the rationality of the relationship between the classification and the purpose, and that party must “negative every conceivable basis which might support” the classification “whether or not the basis has a foundation in the record.” *Heller v. Doe by Doe*, 509 U.S. 312, 320 (1993) (quotation marks and citations omitted). Thus, courts are to accept generalizations regarding the rational basis, “even when there is an imperfect fit between means and ends” and even if the classification “is not made with mathematical nicety or because in practice it results in some inequality.” *Id.* at 321 (quotation marks and citation omitted).

---

<sup>2</sup> As noted by the Ninth Circuit, the Guidelines technically are not governed by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which applies only to states, but the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment “similarly prohibits unjustified discrimination by federal actors” and the “approach to Fifth Amendment equal protection claims has always been precisely the same as to equal protection claims under the Fourteenth Amendment.” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1112 n.6 (quoting *Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld*, 420 U.S. 636, 638 n.2 (1975)).

## BACKGROUND

### A. History of Relevant Guidelines Amendments

In 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act (“FSA”) to “restore fairness to Federal cocaine sentencing.” Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-220, 124 Stat. 2372 (2010). Among other provisions, the FSA reduced the disparity between the amount of crack cocaine and powder cocaine needed to trigger mandatory minimum sentences and gave the Sentencing Commission the authority to amend the Guidelines to reflect the statute’s changes. *Id.* §§ 2, 8. Pursuant to this authority, in 2011 the Sentencing Commission promulgated Amendment 750, which, among other things, reduced base offense levels for certain crack-cocaine-related offenses. U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 750, Part A (2011). The Sentencing Commission gave Amendment 750 retroactive effect. U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 759 (2011).

In 2011, the Sentencing Commission also amended §1B1.10, its policy statement applicable to sentence reductions as a result of an amended guideline range. As relevant here, the Sentencing Commission amended §1B1.10(b)(2)(B), which provides the exceptions to § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A)’s general prohibition against reducing a sentence below the amended guideline range. The previous version stated:

Exception.—If the original term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing, a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection may be appropriate. However, if the original term of imprisonment constituted a non-guideline sentence determined pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) and *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005), a further reduction generally would not be appropriate.

U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (2010). This allowed defendants who received below-guidelines departures or variances at their original sentencing to receive a comparable reduction below the amended guideline range in a sentence-modification proceeding.

The 2011 amended version of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) removed the sentence-modification judge's discretion to consider any variances or departures other than a departure for substantial assistance.<sup>3</sup> The amended version states:

Exception for Substantial Assistance.—If the term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing pursuant to a government motion to reflect the defendant's substantial assistance to authorities, a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range determined under subdivision (1) of this subsection may be appropriate.

U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (2011). This is the version that is currently effective.

On November 1, 2014, the Sentencing Commission issued Amendment 782 to the Guidelines. U.S.S.G. Manual App'x C, Amend. 782 (2014). Amendment 782 reduces base offense levels by two for certain drug crimes, including the crimes of which Defendant was convicted. The Sentencing Commission also amended a portion of § 1B1.10, in a manner not relevant to this case.

## **B. Defendant's Sentencing Information**

On January 2, 2013, Defendant entered into a plea agreement with the government. Defendant agreed to plead guilty to a racketeering conspiracy with drug trafficking predicates in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1962(d), a drug trafficking conspiracy in violation of 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(a)(1)(C) and 846, and money laundering in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h). The parties agreed to a base level offense of 34, a two-level upward adjustment for Defendant's role as an organizer or leader (pursuant to U.S.S.G. §3B1.1(c)), a two-level upward adjustment for money laundering (pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 2S1.1(B)(2)(b)), and a three-level downward adjustment for acceptance of responsibility. This resulted in an offense level of 35. The parties further agreed to

---

<sup>3</sup> Departures other than a departure for substantial assistance are also referenced herein as "non-cooperation departures."

a four-level downward variance pursuant to early resolution of a complex case and consideration of the §3553(a) factors. This resulted in an offense level of 31. Defendant's plea agreement contemplated a criminal history category of II, although Defendant's presentence report found a criminal history category of III. The Court applied a criminal history category of II in Defendant's original sentencing. Offense level 31 with a criminal history of II resulted in a sentencing range of 121 to 151 months. Defendant was sentenced to 126 months.

If Amendment 782 had been in effect, Defendant's base offense level would have been 32 instead of 34. Adding the two-level upward adjustment for his role as a leader and two-level upward adjustment for money laundering, and subtracting his three-level adjustment for acceptance of responsibility, Defendant's adjusted offense category under Amendment 782 would have been 33. The next step is where the parties disagree. The government asserts that because § 1B1.10(b)(2) states that a sentence may not be further reduced except for a reduction based on substantial assistance, which does not apply in this case, under Amendment 782 Defendant's amended offense level is 33, with a corresponding amended guideline range of 151 to 188 months. Thus, concludes the government, because Defendant was originally sentenced to 126 months, which is "less than the minimum of the amended guideline range," § 1B1.10(b)(2) prohibits the Court from reducing Morales's sentence.

Defendant argues that his original sentencing determination should remain unaffected, except for reducing his offense level by two pursuant to Amendment 782. Thus, Defendant argues his amended offense level is 29. With a criminal history category of II, his amended guideline range is 97-121 months. Defendant moves to have his sentence reduced to 97 months.

### **DISCUSSION**

Defendant argues that in having his sentence modified under Amendment 782, he should continue to receive the benefit of the downward variances that were negotiated and agreed-upon

PAGE 8 – OPINION AND ORDER

in his plea agreement and applied by the Court in his original sentencing. Defendant asserts that the government's interpretation of § 1B1.10(b)(2) as requiring that courts may not apply variances and non-cooperation departures in sentence-modification proceedings is unlawful because: (A) variances and departures are "guideline application decisions" that are specifically instructed to be left "unaffected" under § 1B1.10(b)(1) and are therefore included in calculating the "amended guideline range"; (B) the requirement as interpreted by the government is contrary to the Sentencing Commission's statutory directive; (C) the requirement as interpreted by the government violates equal protection; and (D) under the doctrine of constitutional avoidance, if the Court finds "serious questions" as to the constitutionality of § 1B1.10(b)(2) as interpreted by the government, the Court should interpret the provision as including departures and variances, as interpreted by Defendant.

#### **A. Whether Variances and Departures are "Guideline Applications Decisions"**

Section 1B1.10(b)(1) instructs that when considering a sentence modification pursuant to a retroactive Guidelines change, the changed provision is incorporated and "all other guideline application decisions" are to remain unaffected. Defendant argues that variances and departures are "guideline application decisions" that must remain unaffected. Thus, argues Defendant, the government's interpretation of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) to limit a court's ability to reduce a sentence below the amended minimum guideline range after the applicable Guidelines amendment is applied is contrary to § 1B.10(b)(1)'s directive to keep all other "guideline application decisions" unaffected.

A "departure" is a divergence from the originally calculated sentence range based on a specific Guidelines departure provision, whereas a "variance" is a divergence from the Guidelines range based on an exercise of the Court's discretion under § 3553(a). *See United States v. Fumo*, 655 F.3d 288, 317 (3d Cir. 2011), *as amended* (Sept. 15, 2011). Defendant

PAGE 9 – OPINION AND ORDER

argues that variances and departures are “guideline application decisions” and thus are required to be applied after Amendment 782 is employed to lower the base offense level, resulting in an “amended guideline range” that includes the originally-applied departures and variances.

The phrases “guideline application decision” and “amended guideline range,” in isolation, may be ambiguous as to whether they include departures and variances. When considering the full text of § 1B1.10, its commentary, the text of its previous version, and applicable case law, however, it is evident that these phrases do not include variances and departures.

#### **1. Text and context of current version of § 1B1.10**

The interpretation that departures and variances are not “guideline application decisions” and thus are not included in the “amended guideline range” is consistent with the text and context of § 1B1.10. If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions” that were part of the “amended guideline range,” then § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) would contain surplusage. Section 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) creates an exception allowing a reduction below the “amended guideline range” based on substantial assistance, as long as such a reduction was part of the original sentencing pursuant to a government motion. If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions” that had to remain unaffected under § 1B1.10(b)(1) and were therefore included in the “amended guideline range,” then there would be no need to create a specific exception to allow a reduction in a sentence-modification proceeding for substantial assistance. Under Defendant’s interpretation, the substantial assistance reduction would necessarily be included in the sentence modification as a “guideline application decision” and the exception created in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) would be superfluous, and arguably meaningless. Defendant’s interpretation is contrary to “the canon of construction that courts interpret statutes so as not to render any section meaningless.” *Meng Li v. Eddy*, 324 F.3d 1109, 1110 (9th

PAGE 10 – OPINION AND ORDER

Cir. 2003) (citing *Beck v. Prupis*, 529 U.S. 494, 506 (2000)); *see also United States v. Harrell*, 637 F.3d 1008, 1010-11 (9th Cir. 2011) (noting that courts must give effect to each word and “must ‘mak[e] every effort not to interpret a provision in a manner that renders other provisions of the same statute inconsistent, meaningless or superfluous’” (alteration in original) (quoting *United States v. Cabaccang*, 332 F.3d 622, 627 (9th Cir. 2003) (en banc))).

The government’s interpretation is also consistent with the Guidelines’ definition of “departure.” Under the Guidelines, “departure” is an “imposition of a sentence outside the applicable guideline range or of a sentence that is otherwise different from the guideline sentence.” U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.1, Application Note 1(E). The Supreme Court similarly has defined “departure” as creating a non-Guidelines sentence. *See Irizarry v. United States*, 553 U.S. 708, 714 (2008) (“‘Departure’ is a term of art under the Guidelines and refers only to non-Guidelines sentences imposed under the framework set out in the Guidelines.”).

Additionally, this interpretation is consistent with the commentary to § 1B1.10. The Guidelines commentary “is akin to an agency’s interpretation of its own legislative rules” and if it “does not violate the Constitution or a federal statute, it must be given ‘controlling weight unless it is plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation.’” *Stinson v. United States*, 508 U.S. 36, 45 (1993); *see also United States v. Vasquez-Cruz*, 692 F.3d 1001, 1006 (9th Cir. 2012) (quoting *Stinson* to support the proposition that “a change in the language of an applicable Guidelines provision, including a change in application notes or commentary, supersedes prior decisions applying earlier versions of that provision, just as we would be bound to apply the updated version of an agency rule or regulation”).

A court may only impose a sentence reduction that is consistent with the applicable Guidelines policy statement (here, § 1B1.10). 18 U.S.C. §§ 3582(c)(1)(A)(ii), 3582(c)(2); *see*

*also Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 821. Section 1B1.10(a) states that “[a] reduction in the defendant’s term of imprisonment is not consistent with this policy statement and therefore is not authorized under 18 U.S.C. 3582(c)(2) if . . . [the amendment] does not have the effect of lowering the defendant’s applicable guideline range.” U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(a)(2). The Application Note of subsection (a) defines “applicable guideline range” as “the guideline range that . . . is determined before consideration of any departure provision in the Guidelines Manual or a variance.”

U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10, cmt. n. 1(A). Although this commentary defines the phrase for purposes of § 1B1.10(a), the Court “detect[s] no reasoning that would overcome the presumption that the same definition applies when determining the ‘applicable’ Guidelines range for purposes of § 1B1.10(b).” *United States v. Steele*, 714 F.3d 751, 755, n.2 (2d Cir. 2013). Additionally, as discussed by the Second Circuit, the “amended guideline range” is simply the “applicable guideline range” after a retroactive amendment has been applied—there is the “applicable guideline range” at the time of the original sentencing and the “applicable guideline range” after the amendment is applied, and the phrase “amended guideline range” refers to the latter. *United States v. Montanez*, 717 F.3d 287, 293 (2d Cir. 2013). Accordingly “courts should use the same procedure to calculate both the applicable guideline range and the amended guideline range, departing from that procedure in the case of the amended guideline range only to ‘substitute . . . the [relevant guideline] amendments.’” *Id.* (alteration in original) (quoting U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(1)). Thus, after considering the applicable retroactive amendment, the “amended guideline range” does not include departures or variances. *Id.* (noting that in determining the amended guideline range, courts should not consider any departures or variances).

Similarly, the Application Note of subsection (b)(2) is illustrative in demonstrating that departures and variances are not “guideline application decisions” that are part of the “amended



guideline range.” This Application Note provides examples of how the amended guideline range is to be calculated. U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10, cmt. n. 3. The example discussing original sentences that were “outside the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing” because of downward departures or variances clarifies that such downward adjustments do not carry over into the new sentence that may be imposed pursuant to a retroactive Guidelines amendment. *Id.*

Finally, the commentary to Amendment 759, which enacted the 2011 amendments to § 1B1.10, explains that departures and variances are not included in the “applicable guideline range,” which means they are not included in the “amended guideline range.” The “Reason for Amendment” provided by the Sentencing Commission in promulgating the amendment explained that it issued the amendment, in part, to resolve a circuit split over whether the “applicable guideline range” includes any departures.<sup>4</sup> U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 759, Reason for Amendment, at 421 (2011). The Sentencing Commission noted that some circuits applied certain departures, particularly departures under § 4A1.3 (Departures Based on Inadequacy of Criminal History Category), in determining the applicable guideline range, whereas other circuits did not. *Id.* Thus, the amendment “amends Application Note 1 to clarify that the applicable guideline range referred to in § 1B1.10 is the guideline range determined pursuant to § 1B1.1(a), which is determined before consideration of *any* departure provision in the Guidelines Manual or *any* variance.” *Id.* (emphasis added). Defendant argues that this comment is irrelevant because the circuit split did not involve the issues raised in this case and instead involved departures under § 4A1.3. The amendment, however, was not constrained to

---

<sup>4</sup> Courts may properly rely on the Reason for Amendment to interpret an amendment. *See United States v. Boyd*, 721 F.3d 1259, 1263-64 (10th Cir. 2013).

that one departure, but was made more broadly to clarify that the “applicable guideline range” does not include *any* departures or *any* variances.

The commentary’s interpretation that “guideline application decisions” and “amended guideline range” do not include departures and variances is not plainly erroneous or contrary to the regulation, or, as discussed further below, unconstitutional or contrary to statute. Accordingly, it is given controlling weight.

## **2. Text and context of previous version of § 1B1.10**

The interpretation that departures and variances are not “guideline application decisions” that are included in the “amended guideline range” is further supported by considering the text and context of the previous version of § 1B1.10, before the 2011 amendment. Defendant’s interpretation under this version of § 1B1.10 would again render certain provisions surplusage and arguably meaningless. The previous version contained the same provisions instructing courts to leave “guideline application decisions” unaffected in § 1B1.10(b)(1) and foreclosing the court from reducing a sentence to a term that is less than the minimum of the “amended guideline range” in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A). U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10 (2010). But the previous version had different text in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B), instructing that on modification, reductions comparable to original departures “may” be appropriate but that reductions comparable to original variances “generally would not be appropriate.” U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (2010). Thus, under the previous version of § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B), a court had the discretion in modifying a sentence to apply, or not to apply, departures or variances that had originally been applied. If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions” that were required to remain unaffected, then the court would have no need of the “discretion” to apply departures and variances because they already would need to be included, and the discretion not to apply them would run afoul of the directive to leave “guideline application decisions” unaffected. The fact that the current version

of § 1B1.10(b)(2) removes the Court's discretion to consider variances and departures other than for substantial assistance does not convert departures and variances into "guideline application decisions" that are part of the "amended guideline range."

### 3. Case law

The Eleventh Circuit, in an unpublished opinion, recently considered and rejected the precise argument that Defendant makes here. *United States v. Pierce*, 616 F. App'x 410, 411 (11th Cir. 2015) (per curiam). The defendant in *Pierce* argued that "§ 1B1.10(b)(2) here nullifies what § 1B1.10(b)(1) requires to be left 'unaffected' because [the defendant] will not receive the benefit of a downward variance comparable to the one he received at his original sentencing." *Id.* The Eleventh Circuit rejected this argument, finding that "the variance from which Pierce seeks to benefit and application of which was barred by § 1B1.10(b)(2) was not a 'guideline application decision,' as variances are imposed after the applicable guideline range is set." *Id.*; *but see United States v. Shrewder*, 2015 WL 6123754, at \*1 (N.D. Ohio Oct. 16, 2015) (noting without analysis that "[i]n order to leave all other guideline application decisions unaffected, this Court applies the same enhancements and departures applied by [the original sentencing judge]").

Other Circuits have also found that departures and variances are not a "guideline application decision" or are not to be included in the "amended guideline range." *See, e.g., United States v. Hogan*, 722 F.3d 55, 60 (1st Cir. 2013) ("Thus, Application Note 1 prohibits courts from applying departures prior to the determination of the amended guideline range in a proceeding for a sentence reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)."); *United States v. Boyd*, 721 F.3d 1259, 1260-64 (10th Cir. 2013) (analyzing the text and commentary of § 1B1.10 and associated provisions and concluding that a downward departure was not an "application decision" that remains "unaffected" but "is to be disregarded in calculating the defendant's

PAGE 15 – OPINION AND ORDER

amended guideline range”); *Montanez*, 717 F.3d at 292 (analyzing the text of § 1B1.10 and its commentary and concluding “[c]onsequently, the ‘amended guideline range,’ as the ‘range that would have been applicable to the defendant’ had the relevant amendments been in effect, does not incorporate any departure a court previously granted under [the departure provision at issue in the case]”); *United States v. Valdez*, 492 F. App’x 895, 899 (10 Cir. 2012) (finding that the Application Notes to § 1B1.10 foreclose the argument that departures or variances are “guideline application decisions” because “they make it clear that the ‘guideline range’ affected by a § 3582(c)(2) proceeding is the range calculated *before* any departure or variance from the Guideline calculation” (emphasis in original)).

Although the Ninth Circuit has not yet directly considered whether departures and variances are “guideline application decisions,” it has determined that they are not included in the “applicable guideline range.” See *United States v. Pleasant*, 704 F.3d 808, 812 (9th Cir.) *cert. denied*, 134 S. Ct. 824 (2013) (“In short, Amendment 759 makes clear that the applicable guideline is derived pre-departure and pre-variance.”). If departures and variances were “guideline application decisions,” they would necessarily be included in the amended “applicable guideline range” (or “amended guideline range”). Thus, the Ninth Circuit’s conclusion that departures and variances are not included in the “applicable guideline range” forecloses the argument that they are “guideline application decisions” or that they should be included in the “amended guideline range.”

In considering the previous version of § 1B1.10, courts also found that application of original departures and variances is not required when modifying a sentence under § 3582(c)(2), and thus they are not “guideline application decisions” that must remain unaffected. See, e.g., *United States v. Vautier*, 144 F.3d 756, 761 (11th Cir. 1998) (holding that “a district court, ruling

on a defendant's § 3582(c)(2) motion, has the discretion to decide whether to re-apply a downward departure for substantial assistance when considering what sentence the court would have imposed under the amended guideline. . . . Thus, whether to consider a downward departure in determining what sentence the court would have imposed under the amended guideline remains discretionary, and the court is not bound by its earlier decision at the original sentencing to depart downward from the sentencing guidelines range.”); *United States v. Wyatt*, 115 F.3d 606, 610 (8th Cir.1997) (“A discretionary decision to depart from the Guidelines range on the basis of substantial assistance made at the original time of sentencing is not a ‘guideline application decision’ that remains intact when the court considers the new Guideline range. The district court’s discretionary decision of whether to depart from the new amended Guidelines range based upon Wyatt’s prior substantial assistance is not dictated or mandated by either its prior decision to depart or by the extent of the prior departure . . . . The district court retains unfettered discretion to consider anew whether a departure from the new sentencing range is now warranted in light of the defendant’s prior substantial assistance.” (citation omitted)). This interpretation remains consistent with the current text of § 1B1.10.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Considering the text and context of § 1B1.10 and its commentary, court decisions interpreting the current and previous version of § 1B1.10, and the canons of constructions, the Court concludes that departures and variances are not “guideline application decisions” and are not included in the “amended guideline range.” Defendant’s arguments to the contrary are rejected.

#### **B. Whether §1B1.10(b)(2) Conflicts with the Sentencing Commission’s Statutory Directive**

Defendant also argues that §1B1.10(b)(2) conflicts with Sentencing Commission’s statutory directive in 28 U.S.C. § 991(b), which states:

PAGE 17 – OPINION AND ORDER

(b) The purposes of the United States Sentencing Commission are to:

(1) establish sentencing policies and practices for the Federal criminal justice system that:

(A) assure the meeting of the purposes of sentencing as set forth in section 3553(a)(2) of title 18, United States Code;

(B) provide certainty and fairness in meeting the purposes of sentencing, avoiding unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar criminal conduct while maintaining sufficient flexibility to permit individualized sentences when warranted by mitigating or aggravating factors not taken into account in the establishment of general sentencing practices; and

(C) reflect, to the extent practicable, advancement in knowledge of human behavior as it relates to the criminal justice process . . . .

28 U.S.C. § 991(b). Defendant contends that by permitting courts to grant sentence reductions to people who did not receive variances and departures other than for substantial assistance but requiring courts to deny reductions to people who did receive such variances and departures, this provision nullifies the determinations previously made by the sentencing court and creates unwarranted disparities.

In *United States v. Tercero*, the Ninth Circuit considered whether § 1B1.10, and particularly its prohibition on consideration of variances and departures other than for substantial assistance, conflicted “with the purpose of the Guidelines . . . . to bring about an effective, fair sentencing system, with honest, uniform and *proportionate* sentences.” 734 F.3d 979, 983 (9th Cir. 2013) (quotation marks omitted) (emphasis added). The defendant in *Tercero* argued that § 1B1.10(b)(2) conflicted with this purpose because it precluded the district court from revising the defendant’s sentence to reflect the minor role she had played, which resulted in a downward departure at her original sentencing. The Ninth Circuit rejected this argument, finding that:

It is not in dispute, however, that when the district court originally sentenced Tercero, it *did* consider the sentencing factors set forth in § 3553(a). A motion brought under § 3582(c)(2) “does not authorize a sentencing or resentencing proceeding. Instead, it provides for the modification of a term of imprisonment by giving courts the power to ‘reduce’ an otherwise final sentence in circumstances specified by the Commission.” *Dillon*, 130 S.Ct. at 2690. “Section 3582(c)(2)’s text, together with its narrow scope, shows that Congress intended to authorize only a limited adjustment to an otherwise final sentence and not a plenary resentencing proceeding.” *Id.* at 2691. The procedural posture of this case makes it inappropriate for us to reweigh the sentencing factors set forth in § 3553(a) to assess the fairness of Tercero’s 70-month sentence.

*Id.* at 983 (emphasis in original). The court also emphasized that the Sentencing Commission has been given a substantial role with respect to sentence modifications, tasked with deciding whether to amend Guidelines and to what extent an amendment will be retroactive, and given “the power to issue policy statements to address, among other things, ‘the appropriate use of . . . the sentence modification provisions set forth in’ § 3582(c).” *Id.* (alteration in original) (quoting 18 U.S.C. § 994(a)(2)(C)). The Ninth Circuit thus concluded that “the revisions to § 1B1.10 fall squarely within the scope of Congress’s articulated role for the Commission.” *Id.* at 983-84.

The Court is bound by this Ninth Circuit precedent. Defendant attempts to distinguish *Tercero*, arguing that it analyzed whether § 1B1.10 conflicted with the purpose of the Guidelines, not whether § 1B1.10 conflicts with 28 U.S.C. § 991(b) and, particularly, its prohibition against sentencing disparities. The Court finds this to be a distinction without substantial difference. Although *Tercero* did not expressly cite to § 991(b), it analyzed, and rejected, the argument that § 1B1.10 conflicted “with the purpose of the Guidelines . . . .” *Id.*, at 983. The purposes of the Guidelines are directed by § 991(b), including the goal of eliminating sentencing disparity. *See, e.g., Dorsey v. United States*, 132 S. Ct. 2321, 2333 (2012) (citing and

quoting 28 U.S.C. § 991(b)(1)(B) for the proposition that “purposes of Guidelines-based sentencing include ‘avoiding unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar criminal conduct’”); *Chapman v. United States*, 500 U.S. 453, 473 (1991) (J. Stevens, dissenting) (noting that “one of the central purposes of the Sentencing Guidelines . . . was to eliminate disparity in sentencing”); *United States v. Banuelos-Rodriguez*, 215 F.3d 969, 983 (9th Cir. 2000) (“A central goal of the Sentencing Guidelines is to eliminate sentencing disparity. The purpose of the Sentencing Commission was to establish guidelines that ‘avoid[ ] unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar criminal conduct.’ 28 U.S.C. § 991(b)(1)(B).”). Thus, *Tercero*’s conclusion that § 1B1.10 does not conflict with the purpose of the Guidelines implies that § 1B1.10 does not conflict with § 991(b).

Additionally, whatever the label placed on it, the substance of the argument in *Tercero* was the same as Defendant raises here—that § 1B1.10(b)(2)’s prohibition on considering departures and variances results in unfair and disproportionate sentences. The Ninth Circuit’s reasoning in rejecting this argument was not based on the text of § 3553(a). The Ninth Circuit considered the broad power of the Sentencing Commission to establish sentence modification limitations, the limited scope of § 3582(c) proceedings, and the fact that at original sentencing a defendant received the benefit of consideration of all departures and variances in concluding that it is “inappropriate” for a court to “reweigh” the § 3553(a) factors in considering a sentence modification. That reasoning is equally applicable to Defendant’s argument that § 1B1.10(b)(2) conflicts with § 991(b).

Based on binding Ninth Circuit precedent, the Court finds that the limitation in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) precluding consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures in the



context of a sentence modification under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c) does not conflict with 18 U.S.C. § 991(b).

### **C. Whether the Policy Statement Violates Equal Protection**

The previous version of § 1B1.10(b)(2) gave courts considering a sentence reduction the discretion to impose variances and departures comparable to those that were imposed during the original sentencing. U.S.S.G. Manual § 1B1.10(b)(2) (2010). The current version of § 1B1.10(b)(2) eliminates this discretion and prohibits a court from reducing sentences based on previously-imposed variances and non-cooperation departures. Defendant argues that this creates two classes of persons—those who did not originally receive any variances or non-cooperation departures and thus are eligible for a reduction, and those whose eligibility for a reduction is constrained because they originally received variances or non-cooperation departures. Defendant argues that there is no rational purpose for distinguishing between these two classes and no rational relationship between prohibiting consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures and a legitimate government purpose. As stated above, rational-basis review is quite narrow and Defendant faces a heavy burden to disprove the rationality of the relationship between the change to § 1B1.10(b)(2) and any “reasonably conceivable” rational basis.

Defendant argues that the classification in § 1B1.10(b) is analogous to classifications that have been held to violate equal protection, such as classifications granting presentence credits to persons convicted of crimes with a statutory minimum and denying those credits to persons convicted of crimes that do not carry a statutory minimum (*Dunn v. United States*, 376 F.2d 191 (4th Cir. 1967) and *Myers v. United States*, 446 F.2d 232 (9th Cir. 1971)) and classifications granting presentence credits to adults but not juveniles (*Jonah R. v. Carmona*, 446 F.3d 1000 (9th Cir. 2006)). These cases are distinguishable.

The cases involving presentence credits being given for crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence but not for crimes without a mandatory minimum are distinguishable for several reasons. First, it is a reasonable assumption that crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence are more serious than crimes that do not have a mandatory minimum. *See Dunn*, 376 F.2d at 193-94 (noting that it “would be an arbitrary discrimination to credit a defendant with presentence custody upon conviction of an offense of a magnitude requiring the imposition of a minimum mandatory sentence, but to withhold such credit when the offense is not so grave as to require a minimum term of imprisonment”). Although Defendant argues that members of the class of inmates who did not receive any departures or variances are “more dangerous” and “less deserving” of a reduction, Defendant has not shown that offenders who did not receive downward departures or variances are necessarily more dangerous or less deserving than offenders who did receive such departures and variances. The Court declines to so broadly paint the entire class. Departures and variances are given for many different reasons and are not necessarily an indication that an offender is less dangerous than an offender who did not receive a departure or variance.

Defendant also fails to prove that offenders convicted of only the most “grave” offenses will receive the benefit of retroactive sentence reductions. Persons convicted of “grave” offenses may have received departures or variances that render them ineligible for a reduction under Amendment 782, whereas persons convicted of lesser crimes may not have received any departures or variances, rendering them eligible.

Second, the provision of presentence credits to offenders convicted of crimes with mandatory minimum sentences was required under the applicable statute and was automatic. *See Dunn*, 376 F.2d at 193 (“Denial of [presentence custody] credit . . . where others guilty of crimes

of the same or greater magnitude *automatically* receive credit, would entail an arbitrary discrimination within the power and hence the duty of the court to avoid.” (emphasis added)). Here, whether to allow a sentence reduction, even to those inmates who qualify under § 1B1.10, is a discretionary decision made by the judge considering the sentence reduction.

Third, the interpretation that the statute prohibited presentence credits to any offenders other than those convicted of a crime with a mandatory minimum sentence was a constrained reading of the statute. The statute was enacted because although it was the uniform practice of courts to allow presentence credits to offenders convicted of crimes that did not have a mandatory minimum sentence, some courts prohibited such credits to offenders who were convicted of crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence because those courts were concerned allowing such credits would conflict with the statutory minimum. *See id.* at 193. Accordingly, Congress enacted a statute clarifying that presentence credits were to be given to offenders convicted of crimes with a mandatory minimum sentence. *Id.* This was intended to expand the availability of presentence credits to offenders convicted of crimes with mandatory minimum sentences, not to flip the situation so that such offenders were the only persons eligible for presentence credits while offenders who previously had uniformly been receiving the credits were no longer eligible. *Id.* No such strained interpretation is present in this case. The Sentencing Commission’s decision to remove any consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures was “careful and deliberate.” *Hogan*, 722 F.3d at 61.

Finally, Defendant and other offenders who received departures and variances have not been precluded from receiving the benefit of those departures and variances. They received full consideration of all possible departures and variances at the time of his original sentencing and the benefit of any that were granted to them. Sentence-modification proceedings are not “plenary

resentencing proceeding[s].” *Dillon*, 560 U.S. at 826. The fact that this class of offenders will not receive the benefit of comparable departures and variances in a resentencing proceeding does not detract from the fact that they already received that benefit in a lower original sentence. *See United States v. Berberena*, 694 F.3d 514, 521 (3d Cir. 2012) (“Rather than undo the effect of previous departures and variances, the Commission has merely limited the extent to which new ones can be awarded in § 3582(c)(2) proceedings.”).

*Jonah R.* is similarly distinguishable. That case turned on statutory interpretation, looking at the statute on presentence credits, the Federal Juvenile Delinquency Act, and the Youth Corrections Act to determine whether juveniles were eligible for presentence credits. 446 F.3d at 1103-05. After the federal District Court in the U.S. Virgin Island held that juveniles were not entitled to presentence credits, the Bureau of Prisons had changed its policy interpreting the relevant statutes as not permitting juveniles to receive presentence credits. *Id.* at 1002-03. The Ninth Circuit noted that it was not giving the ordinary “substantial deference” to the Bureau’s interpretation because the agency did not argue for it, the revised interpretation contradicted previous interpretations, and the revised interpretation was based on a court case and not on agency expertise. *Id.* at 1006. The Ninth Circuit then determined whether juveniles were entitled to presentence credits by looking at the text, context, purpose, and legislative history of the relevant statutes. *Id.* at 1006-11. The Ninth Circuit also discussed a related statute that requires that presentence credit to be given to juvenile offenders convicted abroad and transferred to an American detention facility. *Id.* at 1007-08. The court then noted that “[i]t strains credulity . . . to think that Congress would intend to deal more harshly with juveniles unlucky enough to be arrested in the United States” and that “disparate treatment [of this sort] might well trigger equal protection concerns.” Thus, the equal protection concern in *Jonah R.* was that juveniles who

were arrested in the United States would not receive presentence credit, while juveniles arrested abroad would receive such credit. This type of concern is not present here. There is no geographic disparity or other similar, irrational basis for distinguishing which offenders will be eligible for a reduction.

Defendant also argues that revised § 1B1.10(b)(2) creates irrational results.<sup>5</sup> Defendant offers the following scenario: Two defendants are convicted of the same crime, have similar

---

<sup>5</sup> Defendant relies on *Mellouli v. Lynch*, 135 S.Ct. 1980 (2015), to argue that these irrational results demonstrate that § 1B1.10(b) fails under rational-basis review. *Mellouli* did not involve an equal protection claim, but analyzed whether a misdemeanor conviction under a Kansas law prohibiting drug paraphernalia triggered deportation under 8 U.S.C. § 1227(a)(2)(B)(i). *Id.* at 1983-84. In 2009, the Bureau of Immigration Appeals (“BIA”) had announced an interpretation of the relevant statutes that held that although state-law convictions for drug possession or distribution required the conviction be based on a federally-controlled substance under 21 U.S.C. § 802, drug paraphernalia offenses relate to the drug trade in general and thus need not be proven to be paraphernalia related to a substance listed under § 802. *Id.* at 1988. The Supreme Court found that this “disparate approach to state drug convictions” had “no home in the text of § 1227(a)(2)(B)(i),” led “to consequences Congress could not have intended,” and arose from the BIA’s “conflicting positions on the meaning of § 1227(a)(2)(B)(i),” which caused “the anomalous result that minor paraphernalia possession offenses are treated more harshly than drug possession and distribution offenses.” *Id.* at 1989. The Supreme Court noted that it made “scant sense” that paraphernalia possession, “an offense less grave than drug possession and distribution,” triggered removal regardless of whether the offense implicated a federally controlled substance, while the more serious crimes of drug possession and distribution only triggered removal if they implicated a federally-controlled substance. *Id.* (“The incongruous upshot is that an alien is *not* removable for *possessing* a substance controlled only under Kansas law, but he *is* removable for using a sock to contain that substance.”). Based on its finding that BIA’s interpretation made little sense, the Supreme Court held that the interpretation “is owed no deference under the doctrine described in *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 843 (1984). *Id.*”

*Mellouli* is distinguishable from the case at bar. Unlike the BIA action in that case, the Sentencing Commission here does not have conflicting policy statements on this issue, made a deliberate decision to eliminate a court’s discretion to apply variances and non-cooperation departures during a sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2) based on stated concerns, and made the decision pursuant to the express grant of authority under 28 U.S.C. § 994(u), to “specify in what circumstances and by what amount the sentences of prisoners serving terms of imprisonment for the offense may be reduced.” Further, § 1B1.10 does not create a result not intended by the Sentencing Commission or by Congress. Additionally, *Mellouli* was not

criminal histories, and have identical guideline ranges; Defendant A is originally sentenced to a below-guidelines sentence, receiving a two-level downward variance because the judge found that Defendant A's history and characteristics warranted a lighter sentence; Defendant B is sentenced to the guidelines range because the judge determined a longer sentence was necessary to carry out the purposes of § 3553(a). In a §3582(c) sentence-modification proceeding, Defendant A is not eligible for an adjustment under § 1B1.10(b)(2) and Defendant B is, resulting in Defendant B receiving a two-level downward adjustment and ultimately receiving the same sentence as Defendant A, despite the original sentencing judge's belief that Defendant B deserved a longer sentence than Defendant A.

This scenario, however, does not demonstrate that prohibiting consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures fails rational-basis review. First, it is important to acknowledge that application of a sentence reduction pursuant to a retroactive Guidelines amendment is discretionary. It is therefore possible that a judge considering a reduction for Defendant B would not apply the sentence reduction, believing the original longer sentence is sufficient but not greater than necessary to carry out the purposes of § 3553(a). If that were the case, then there would be no unwarranted disparity between Defendants A and B.

Second, even if offenders such as Defendant B would have benefitted from Amendment 782 and would have received modified sentences that are no longer proportionally longer than the "less culpable" co-defendants, that result does not prove an equal protection violation under rational-basis review. Defendant's burden under rational-basis review is to show that there is no reasonably conceivable set of facts that could provide a rational basis for the Sentencing Commission's classification of persons eligible for a sentence reduction, not that analyzing agency action under a rational-basis review, but was interpreting a statute and determining whether an agency's interpretation was entitled to deference.

there is a possible set of facts that show a potentially irrational result from that classification. *See Heller*, 509 U.S. at 320-21 (noting that the party challenging a classification must “negative every conceivable basis which might support it” and that a classification survives rational-basis review even if “in practice it results in some inequality”) (quotation marks omitted).

The Sentencing Commission provided two general reasons for making the change and creating the new classification of persons eligible for a reduction.<sup>6</sup> First, the Sentencing Commission noted that the previous version of the policy statement’s distinction between *departures*, which “may” be appropriate to apply when reducing a sentence, and *variances*, which would “generally not” be appropriate to apply when reducing a sentence was difficult to apply and prompted litigation. The Sentencing Commission believed that a single limitation that prohibits consideration of both variances and departures, except for substantial assistance departures, “furthers the need to avoid unwarranted sentencing disparities and avoids litigation. . . . [and] promotes conformity with the amended guideline range and avoids undue complexity and litigation.” U.S.S.G. Manual App’x C, Amend. 759, Reason for Amendment, at 420 (2011). Second, the Sentencing Commission was “concerned that retroactively amending the guidelines could result in a windfall for defendants who had already received a departure or variance, especially one that took into account the disparity in treatment between powder and crack cocaine . . . .” *United States v. Davis*, 739 F.3d 1222, 1225 (9th Cir. 2014). Defendant

---

<sup>6</sup> As noted in *Navarro*, “under rational-basis review, the government actor generally need not ‘actually articulate at any time the purpose or rationale supporting its classification.’” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1113 n.8 (quoting *Armour v. City of Indianapolis, Ind.*, --- U.S. ---, 132 S.Ct. 2073, 2082 (2012)). As the Ninth Circuit did in *Navarro*, the Court here focuses on the governmental interests articulated by the Sentencing Commission because they are most easily addressed. For the reasons stated in Defendant’s reply brief, however, the Court is not persuaded that the other purpose suggested in the government’s brief, the need to avoid geographic disparities in sentencing, survives a rational-basis review.

argues that neither of these concerns rationally justify limiting sentence reductions for defendants with variances and non-cooperation downward departures.

**1. Reducing complexity, litigation, and disparities and promoting conformity**

Defendant argues that the amended policy statement does not avoid undue complexity, litigation, or unwarranted disparity, and, to the contrary, creates more problems. Although the former version made a distinction between departures and variances, it left the application of both to the discretion of the judge. It also preserved the option of applying the original § 3553(a) factors. This approach, Defendant argues, promoted fairness and uniformity and avoided unwarranted disparity. The revised version, argues Defendant, increases the likelihood of litigation by purporting to remove the judge's discretion to apply comparable variances and non-cooperation departures and increases the risk of undue sentencing disparity by overriding many of the individualized decisions made by the original sentencing court after full analysis of the § 3553(a) factors.

Defendant has not met his burden to refute every “reasonably conceivable” basis that might support the Sentencing Commission’s decision that eliminating all variances and non-cooperation departures avoids undue complexity and litigation. Although some litigation may be generated challenging the lawfulness of the policy statement, the actual application of the policy statement is straightforward. No variances or non-cooperation departures are permitted, rendering the modification calculation a relatively simple exercise. The Sentencing Commission’s conclusion that eliminating variances and non-cooperation departures made sentencing modifications less complex and thereby would reduce litigation survives rational-bases review.

Additionally, the Sentencing Commission’s conclusion that eliminating variances and non-cooperation departures would promote uniformity with the amended guideline range also

PAGE 28 – OPINION AND ORDER



survives review. Without departures and variances, the modified sentence necessarily will fall within the amended guideline range.

Regarding the objective of reducing disparity in sentences, although removing the option to consider any § 3553(a) factors or non-cooperation departures may result in some disparity in sentences, Defendant has not shown that there are no “reasonably conceivable state of facts” in which the amended policy statement reduces sentence disparity. *Beach Commc’ns*, 508 U.S. at 313. The question is not whether the policy statement is the best method or wisest policy for addressing the government’s concern, but whether there is a rational connection between the Sentencing Commission’s concern and the decision to preclude application of any variances or non-cooperation departures. It was rational for the Sentencing Commission to be concerned that retroactive Guidelines amendments may not be imposed uniformly. Although the Court recognizes that some disparities in sentencing will likely result from this policy statement, the Court is constrained by the scope of rational-basis review. It cannot be said that constraining the discretion of judges’ to apply variances and non-cooperation departures has no rational connection to addressing the Sentencing Commission’s concern regarding disparate sentences.

## **2. Concern relating to “windfall” sentences upon modification**

Defendant also argues that public testimony and statistical evidence show that the Sentencing Commission’s “windfall” concern was unfounded. Defendant notes that the public testimony revealed that in general defendants would not get “windfalls” because judges had discretion in modifying a sentence to apply comparable departures and variances, and those judges who had originally varied from the guidelines range for policy reasons relating to the difference between powder and crack cocaine could deny any further sentence reduction.

Defendant specifically points to testimony from the representative of the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) commenting that judges depart for policy reasons to a small degree in “a very

PAGE 29 – OPINION AND ORDER

narrow class of cases” and that the DOJ would not object to sentence reductions in other types of cases such as departures for overstated criminal history or variances for medical or mental health conditions. Def’s Reply Br., Dkt. 257 at 13 (citing Tr. of Pub. Hr’g Before the U.S. Sentencing Comm’n at 49-52, 59-60, 61-62, 93, 101-12 (June 1, 2011)). Defendant further argues that even if such “windfalls” had been a problem, eliminating all reductions for variances and non-cooperation departures is not rationally related to that limited concern.

Under rational-basis review, the government’s basis need not have a foundation in the record. *Heller*, 509 U.S. at 320; *see also Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114 (noting that the defendant’s argument that there was insufficient evidence before the Sentencing Commission to conclude that Amendment 788’s one-year delay was necessary before implementing Amendment 782 “misapprehends the scope of rational-basis review. Generally, ‘the absence of legislative facts explaining the distinction on the record has no significance in rational-basis analysis.’” (quoting *Beach Commc’ns*, 508 U.S. at 315)). In fact, “rational-basis review allows for decisions ‘based on rational speculation unsupported by evidence or empirical data.’” *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114 (quoting *Beach Commc’ns*, 508 U.S. at 315).

Here, the Sentencing Commission’s speculation that some offenders may have received a departure or variance to *de facto* adjust for a judge’s belief that the crack cocaine drug guidelines were too high was rational. Eliminating consideration of all variances and non-cooperation reductions has some “rational connection” to this government interest.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, with respect to

---

<sup>7</sup> The Court shares the concern articulated by the Second Circuit, which questioned as a policy matter the Sentencing Commission’s decision to address the “windfall” problem by completely eliminating a court’s discretion to give the benefit of previously-applied departures and variances during sentencing reduction proceedings. *Montanez*, 717 F.3d at 294. The Second Circuit noted that the “policy adopted in § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A) sweeps much more broadly [than the windfall concern], affecting even defendants . . . who benefitted from departures that were unrelated to prior versions of the crack-cocaine guidelines.” *Id.* But as recognized by the Second

Amendment 782, the Sentencing Commission could rationally speculate that some offenders may have received a departure or variance to adjust for a judge's belief that the drug guidelines were too high. This is all that is needed under rational-basis review, "regardless of whether [the policy statement] is an 'exact fit' for the interest at issue" or "is an imperfect fit between means and ends." *Navarro*, 800 F.3d at 1114. Although the Sentencing Commission's reasoning in eliminating all variances and non-cooperation departures will apply with greater force to those offenders who received variances and departures to adjust for the perceived unfairness of the drug guidelines than to those offenders who received variances and departures for other reasons, this fact alone does not render the decision constitutionally-deficient. *See id.* ("The fact that the Commission's reasoning will apply with greater force to some groups of inmates than to others does not invalidate its otherwise-valid decision.").

#### **D. Constitutional Avoidance**

Defendant's final argument is that the Court need not resolve the equal protection challenge and strike §1B1.10's prohibition against consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures, but can instead apply the doctrine of constitutional avoidance. Defendant argues that he has raised "serious questions" regarding the constitutionality of interpreting § 1B1.10 as prohibiting consideration of variances and non-cooperation departures, and thus the Court should apply the doctrine of constitutional avoidance and interpret the policy statement so as to avoid these constitutional implications. Defendant argues this can be done by interpreting the term "amended guidelines range" to include previously-imposed variations and departures.

Because the Court has not found a constitutional violation and does not find, under rational-basis

---

Circuit, "Congress has given the Commission the authority to resolve these policy questions." *Id.* Although the Sentencing Commission may have used a broad approach to address its "windfall" concern, Defendant has not shown that this approach does not have any rational connection to addressing potential "windfall" situations.

review, that serious questions arise regarding the constitutionality of § 1B1.10's prohibition on considering variances and non-cooperation departures, the Court declines to apply the doctrine of constitutional avoidance.

**CONCLUSION**

Defendant's motion (Dkt. 230) to reduce his sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) is DENIED.

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

DATED this 2nd day of December, 2015.

/s/ Michael H. Simon  
Michael H. Simon  
United States District Judge

No. \_\_\_\_\_

---

IN THE SUPREME COURT  
OF THE UNITED STATES

---

JOSE HERNANDEZ-MARTINEZ, et al.,

Petitioners,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Respondent.

---

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari To  
The United States Court Of Appeals  
For The Ninth Circuit

---

---

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE AND MAILING

---

I, Stephen R. Sady, counsel of record and a member of the Bar of this Court, certify that pursuant to Rule 29.3, service has been made of the within APPENDIX TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI, VOLUME 1 on the counsel for the respondent by depositing in the United States Post Office, in Portland, Oregon, on November 12, 2019, first class postage prepaid, an exact and full copy thereof addressed to:

Noel Francisco  
Solicitor General of the United States  
Room 5616  
Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W.  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Scott Kerin  
Assistant U.S. Attorney  
1000 SW Third, Suite 600  
Portland, Oregon 97204


Jeffrey S. Sweet  
Assistant U.S. Attorney  
405 E. Eighth Avenue, Suite 2400  
Eugene, OR 97401

Kelly A. Zusman  
Assistant U.S. Attorney  
1000 SW Third, Suite 600  
Portland, Oregon 97204

Further, the original and ten copies were mailed to the Honorable Scott S. Harris, Clerk of the United States Supreme Court, by depositing them in a United States Post Office Box, addressed to 1 First Street, N.E., Washington, D.C., 20543, for filing on this 12th day of November, 2019, with first-class postage prepaid.

Additionally, I electronically filed the foregoing APPENDIX TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI, VOLUME 1 by the using the Supreme Court's Electronic filing system on November 12, 2019.

Dated this 12th day of November, 2019.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen R. Sady  
Attorney for Petitioners

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 12th day of November, 2019.



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public of Oregon