No. ______________

In the Supreme Court of the United States

EMILIO MEDINA-RODRIGUEZ, *PETITIONER*,

V.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, *RESPONDENT*

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI
TO THE
UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

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QUESTION PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

Should the Court overrule *Almendarez-Torres v. United States*, 523 U.S. 244 (1998)?

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Petitioner Emilio Medina-Rodriguez asks that a writ of certiorari issue to review the opinion and judgment entered by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit on January 10, 2020.

PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDING

The caption of this case names all parties to the proceeding in the court whose judgment is sought to be reviewed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED FOR REVIEW i

PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDING ii

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES iv

OPINION BELOW..1

JURISDICTION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES..1

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS INVOLVED 1

FEDERAL STATUTE INVOLVED...2

STATEMENT...2

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT......................................5

The Court Should Grant Certiorari to Consider Whether to Overrule *Almendarez-Torres v. United States*, 523 U.S. 224 (1998). 5

CONCLUSION.. 11

APPENDIX A *United States v. Medina-Rodriguez*, No. 19-50779 (5th Cir. Jan. 10, 2020) (per curiam)

APPENDIX B *United States v. Medina-Rodriguez*, Indictment, DR-18-CR-2905 December 19, 2018

APPENDIX C 8 U.S.C. § 1326

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Cases

Agostini v. Felton,
521 U.S. 203 (1997) 9

Alleyne v. United States,
570 U.S. 99 (2013) .... *passim*

Almendarez-Torres v. United States,
523 U.S. 224 (1998) .... *passim*

Cunningham v. California,
549 U.S. 270 (2007) 8

Descamps v. United States,
570 U.S. 254 (2013) 6

Marbury v. Madison,
5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137 (1803) 10

Mathis v. United States,
136 S. Ct. 2243 (2016) 6, 9

Rangel-Reyes v. United States,
547 U.S. 1200 (2006) 10

Seminole Tribe v. Florida,
517 U.S. 44 (1996) 9

Sessions v. Dimaya,
138 S. Ct. 1204 (2018) 6, 9

Shepard v. United States,
544 U.S. 13 (2005) 8

State Oil Co. v. Khan,
522 U.S. 3 (1997) 10

United States v. Pineda-Arrellano,
492 F.3d 624 (5th Cir. 2007) 5

Constitutional Provisions

U.S. Const. amend. V 1

U.S. Const. amend. VI 1, 6, 8, 9

Statutes

8 U.S.C. § 1326 .... 1, 2

8 U.S.C. § 1326(a) 2, 4

8 U.S.C. § 1326(b) 2, 3, 4, 5

8 U.S.C. § 1326(b)(1) 3

28 U.S.C. § 1254(1) 1

Rule

Sup. Ct. R. 13.1 1

OPINION BELOW

A copy of the unpublished opinion of the court of appeals, *United States v. Medina-Rodriguez*, No. 19-50779 (5th Cir. Jan. 10, 2020) (per curiam), is attached to this petition as Appendix A.

JURISDICTION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

The opinion and judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit were entered on Jan. 10, 2020. On March 19, 2020, the Court extended the time within which to file a petition for writ of certiorari due on or after that date to 150 days after entry of judgment. *See* Sup. Ct. R. 13.1. The Court has jurisdiction to grant certiorari under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides, in pertinent part: "No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, … nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law …."

The Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides, in pertinent part: "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to … trial, by an impartial jury …."

FEDERAL STATUTE INVOLVED

The text of 8 U.S.C. § 1326 is reproduced in Appendix C.

STATEMENT

Emilio Medina-Rodriguez was charged with illegally reentering the country after having been removed, in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1326. Under § 1326(a), the maximum penalty for illegal reentry is two years' imprisonment. Under § 1326(b), the maximum increases to 10 years if the defendant was removed from the United States after having been convicted of a felony, and to 20 years if he was removed after having been convicted of an aggravated felony. Also, the maximum supervised release term increases from one year to three years. In *Almendarez-Torres v. United States*, 523 U.S. 224 (1998), the Court held that the enhancement-qualifying conviction under § 1326(b) is a sentencing factor, not an element of a separate offense. Medina's indictment cited "§ 1326(b)(1)/(2)" but, in accord with *Almendarez-Torres*, the indictment did not allege a prior conviction. App. B.

Medina pleaded guilty as charged. The factual basis for his guilty plea admitted only the elements of § 1326(a); he did not admit to having a prior conviction that would trigger the enhanced penalties in § 1326(b).

After Medina pleaded guilty, a probation officer prepared a presentence report. Although the indictment did not allege, and Medina did not admit in the factual basis for his guilty plea, that he had been convicted of any crimes prior to his removal from the United States, the report stated that the statutory maximum penalty was 20 years' imprisonment and three years' supervised release under § 1326(b)(2).

Medina did not object to the presentence report. Through the report and allocution at sentencing, the district court learned that Medina once had legal status in the United States. However, he also incurred a series of criminal convictions, which resulted in his removal from the United States.

The district court adopted the presentence report without change and sentenced Medina to 37 months' imprisonment, to be followed by three years' supervised release.

Medina appealed. He argued that, under the reasoning of this Court's decisions in *Apprendi v. New Jersey*, 530 U.S. 466 (2000), and *Alleyne v. United States*, 133 S. Ct. 2151 (2013), 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b) is unconstitutional, insofar as it permits a sentence above the otherwise-applicable statutory maximum based on facts that are neither alleged in the indictment nor found by a jury beyond a reasonable doubt. He acknowledged that the argument was foreclosed by *Almendarez-Torres*, but noted that recent decisions from this Court suggested that *Almendarez-Torres* may be reconsidered. The court of appeals, finding itself bound by *Almendarez-Torres*, affirmed Medina's sentence. App. A at 2.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

The Court Should Grant Certiorari to Consider Whether to Overrule *Almendarez-Torres v. United States*, 523 U.S. 224 (1998).

Title 8 U.S.C. § 1326(a) punishes illegal reentry after removal with a maximum term of two years' imprisonment and one year's supervised release. The district court determined, however, that Medina was subject to an enhanced sentence under § 1326(b), which increases the maximum penalty if the removal occurred after a conviction for a felony or an aggravated felony. The court's decision accorded with this Court's decision in *Almendarez-Torres v. United States*, which held that § 1326(b)'s enhanced penalty is a sentencing factor, not a separate, aggravated offense. 523 U.S. 224, 235 (1998). The Court further ruled that this construction of § 1326(b) did not violate due process; a prior conviction need not be treated as an element of the offense, even if it increases the statutory maximum penalty. *Id.* at 239–47.

However, the continued validity of *Almendarez-Torres* is questionable. Just two years after it was decided, the Court appeared to cast doubt on it. *See Apprendi v. New Jersey*, 530 U.S. 466 (2000). In *Apprendi*, the Court announced that facts that increase the maximum sentence must be proved to the jury beyond a reasonable doubt. *Id.* at 490. The Court acknowledged that this general principle conflicted with the specific holding in *Almendarez-Torres* that a prior conviction need not be treated as an element under § 1326(b). The Court found it "arguable that *Almendarez-Torres* was incorrectly decided, and that a logical application of our reasoning today should apply" to prior convictions as well. *Id.* at 489. But because *Apprendi* did not involve a prior conviction, the Court considered it unnecessary to revisit *Almendarez-Torres*. *Id.* at 490. Instead, the Court framed its holding to avoid expressly overruling the earlier case. *Id.* at 489.

The Court again questioned *Almendarez-Torres*'s reasoning and suggested that the Court would be willing to revisit the decision. *Alleyne v. United States*, 570 U.S. 99, 111 n.1 (2013); *see also Sessions v. Dimaya*, 138 S. Ct. 1204, 1253 (2018) (Thomas, J., dissenting) (opining that *Almendarez-Torres* should be reconsidered); *Mathis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 2243, 2258–59 (2016) (Thomas, J., concurring) (same); *Descamps v. United States*, 570 U.S. 254, 280–81 (2013) (Thomas, J., concurring) (same). These opinions reveal concern that the opinion is constitutionally flawed.

In *Alleyne*, the Court applied *Apprendi*'s rule to mandatory minimum sentences, holding that any fact that produces a higher sentencing range—not just a sentence above the statutory maximum—must be pleaded in the indictment and either admitted by the defendant or proved to a jury beyond a reasonable doubt. *Alleyne*, 570 U.S. at 115–16. In the opinion, the Court apparently recognized that *Almendarez-Torres* remains subject to Sixth Amendment attack. The Court characterized that decision as a "narrow exception to the general rule" that all facts that increase punishment must be alleged and proved beyond a reasonable doubt. *Id.* at 111 n.1. But because the parties in that case did not challenge *Almendarez-Torres*, the Court said it would "not revisit it for purposes of our decision today." *Id.*

Nonetheless, the Court's reasoning in *Alleyne* strengthens the challenge to *Almendarez-Torres*'s recognition of a recidivism exception. *Alleyne* traced the treatment of the relationship between crime and punishment, beginning in the eighteenth century, repeatedly noting how "[the] linkage of facts with particular sentence ranges … reflects the intimate connection between crime and punishment." *Id.* at 109 ("[i]f a fact was by law essential to the penalty, it was an element of the offense"); *see id.* (historically, crimes were defined as "the whole of the wrong to which the law affixes punishment … including any fact that annexes a higher degree of punishment"); *id.* at 111 ("the indictment must contain an allegation of every fact which is legally essential to the punishment to be inflicted"). *Alleyne* concluded that, because "the whole of the" crime and its punishment cannot be separated, the elements of a crime must include any facts that increase the penalty. The Court recognized no limitations or exceptions to this principle.

Alleyne's emphasis that the elements of a crime include the "whole" of the facts for which a defendant is punished seriously undercuts the view, expressed in *Almendarez-Torres*, that recidivism is different from other sentencing facts. *See Almendarez-Torres*, 523 U.S. at 243–44; *see also Apprendi*, 530 U.S. at 490 ("Other than the fact of a prior conviction, any fact that increases the penalty for a crime beyond the prescribed statutory maximum must be submitted to a jury, and proved beyond a reasonable doubt."). The *Apprendi* Court later tried to explain this difference by pointing out that, unlike other facts, recidivism "does not relate to the commission of the offense itself." *Apprendi*, 530 U.S. at 496. But the Court has since acknowledged that *Almendarez-Torres* might have been "incorrectly decided." *Id.* at 489; *see also Shepard v. United States*, 544 U.S. 13, 26 n.5 (2005) (acknowledging that Court's holding in that case undermined *Almendarez-Torres*); *Cunningham v. California*, 549 U.S. 270, 291 n.14 (2007) (rejecting invitation to distinguish between "facts concerning the offense, where *Apprendi* would apply, and facts [like recidivism] concerning the offender, where it would not," because "*Apprendi* itself … leaves no room for the bifurcated approach").

Three concurring justices in *Alleyne* provide additional reasons for revisiting *Almendarez-Torres*. *See Alleyne*, 133 S. Ct. at 2164 (Sotomayor, Ginsburg, Kagan, J.J., concurring). Those justices noted that the viability of the Sixth Amendment principle set forth in *Apprendi* was initially subject to some doubt, and some justices believed the Court "might retreat" from it. *Alleyne*, 570 U.S. at 118–22. Instead, *Apprendi*'s rule "has become even more firmly rooted in the Court's Sixth Amendment jurisprudence." *Id.* Reversal of even recent precedent is warranted when "the reasoning of [that precedent] has been thoroughly undermined by intervening decisions." *Id.* at 121; *see also Dimaya*, 138 S. Ct. at 1253 ("The exception recognized in *Almendarez-Torres* for prior convictions is an aberration, has been seriously undermined by subsequent precedents, and should be reconsidered.") (Thomas, J., dissenting); *Mathis*, 136 S. Ct. at 2259 ("I continue to believe that the exception in *Apprendi* was wrong, and I have urged that *Almendarez-Torres* be reconsidered.") (Thomas, J., concurring).

The growing view among members of this Court that *Almendarez-Torres* was wrongly decided is good reason to clarify whether *Almendarez-Torres* is still the law. Stare decisis "is at its weakest" when the Court interprets the Constitution. *Agostini v. Felton*, 521 U.S. 203, 235 (1997); *see also Seminole Tribe v. Florida*, 517 U.S. 44, 63 (1996). When "there has been a significant change in, or subsequent development of, our constitutional law," stare decisis "does not prevent … overruling a previous decision." *Agostini*, 521 U.S. at 236. Even if the Court were ultimately to reaffirm *Almendarez-Torres*, review is warranted. While lower court judges—as well as prosecutors, defense counsel, and criminal defendants—are forced to rely on the decision, they must speculate as to the ultimate validity of the Court's holding. "There is no good reason to allow such a state of affairs to persist." *Rangel-Reyes v. United States*, 547 U.S. 1200, 1201 (2006) (Thomas, J., dissenting from denial of certiorari).

The question of *Almendarez-Torres*'s validity can be resolved only in this forum. *Rangel-Reyes*, 547 U.S at 1201 (citing *State Oil Co. v. Khan*, 522 U.S. 3, 20 (1997)). *Almendarez-Torres* is a decision of this country's highest court on a question of constitutional dimension; no other court, and no other branch of government, can decide if it is wrong. Regarding the Constitution, it is ultimately this Court's responsibility "to say what the law is." *Marbury v.*

Madison, 5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137, 177 (1803). The Court should grant certiorari to say whether *Almendarez-Torres* is still the law.

CONCLUSION

FOR THESE REASONS, Medina asks that this Honorable Court grant a writ of certiorari.

Respectfully submitted.

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