

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

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**In the Supreme Court of the United States**

JESSE DEAN MINCE, *PETITIONER*,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, *RESPONDENT*.

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

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## **QUESTIONS PRESENTED FOR REVIEW**

Does 18 U.S.C. § 922(g), which criminalizes possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, exceed Congress's power under the Commerce Clause?

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

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JESSE DEAN MINCE, Petitioner,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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**PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI  
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FIFTH CIRCUIT**

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Petitioner Jesse Dean Mince 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 3, 2022.

**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.

## RELATED PROCEEDINGS

All proceedings directly related to the case are:

- *United States v. Mince*, 7:20-cr-00230-DC-1 (W.D. Tex. 2020),
- *United States v. Mince*, No. 21-50127, 2022 WL 29552 (5th Cir. Jan. 3, 2022) (per curiam) (unpublished).

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## OPINION BELOW

A copy of the opinion of the court of appeals, *United States v. Mince*, No. 21-50127, 2022 WL 29552 (5th Cir. Jan. 3, 2022) (per curiam) (unpublished), is attached to this petition as Pet. App. 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 January 3, 2022. This petition is filed within 90 days after that decision. *See* Sup. Ct. R. 13.1. The Court has jurisdiction to grant certiorari under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

## CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION, STATUTES, AND REGULATIONS INVOLVED

Article I of the United States Constitution grants Congress power “[t]o regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States[.]” U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 3.

Title 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1) provides:

It shall be unlawful for any person ... who has been convicted in any court of, a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year ... to ship or transport in interstate or foreign commerce, or possess in or affecting commerce, any firearm or ammunition; or to receive any firearm or ammunition which has been shipped or transported in interstate or foreign commerce.



## STATEMENT

The Government charged Jesse Dean Mince with being a felon in possession of a firearm, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1). Mince proceeded to trial, stipulating that he had previously been convicted of a crime punishable by more than one year's imprisonment, that he knew that, and that the firearm had traveled in interstate commerce. A jury convicted him of a violation of § 922(g)(1), and the district court sentenced him to 51 months' imprisonment.

Mince appealed. Relying on *United States v. Lopez*, 514 U.S. 549 (1995), he argued that 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) exceeds Congress's power under the Commerce Clause and is therefore unconstitutional. Pet. App. B. He contended that because firearm possession is non-commercial, non-economic conduct, it is not an activity that substantially affects interstate commerce. *Id.*

The Fifth Circuit granted the Government's motion for summary affirmance because Mince's Commerce Clause argument is foreclosed by that court's precedent. Pet. App. A.

## REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

**This Court should decide whether 18 U.S.C. § 922(g), which criminalizes noncommercial firearm possession by certain persons, exceeds Congress’s power under the Commerce Clause.**

Title 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) prohibits firearm possession by certain people, including convicted felons. The statute requires that the possession be “in or affecting commerce,” a requirement that this Court has said can be satisfied by proof that, at some time in the past, the firearm traveled in interstate commerce. *See Scarborough v. United States*, 431 U.S. 563, 566–67 & n.5 (1977) (interpreting predecessor statute). But neither *Scarborough* nor any other decision of this Court has considered whether a statute that reaches conduct with such a minimal link to interstate commerce is a constitutional exercise of the federal commerce power. The Court should consider that issue now.

*In United States v. Lopez*, the Court invalidated the Gun-Free School Zones Act, 18 U.S.C. § 922(q), holding that Congress lacked authority to prohibit the possession of a weapon on school premises. 514 U.S. 549 (1995). *Lopez* and later decisions indicate that noncommercial activity like firearm possession is not a subject for commerce regulation, and that the minimal commerce element in § 922(g) cannot make the statute constitutional.

*Lopez* identified three categories that Congress may regulate under its commerce power: (1) the channels of interstate commerce; (2) the instrumentalities of, and persons or things in, interstate commerce; and (3) activities having a substantial relation to interstate commerce. 514 U.S. at 558–59. The Court considered whether 18 U.S.C. § 922(q), which prohibited gun possession near a school, fit within the third category of commerce regulation. Under that category, “the proper test requires an analysis of whether the regulated activity ‘substantially affects’ interstate commerce.” *Lopez*, 514 U.S. at 559. The Court held that § 922(q) failed the “substantial effect” test: gun possession near a school had nothing to do with “commerce” and was not a part of a greater scheme of commercial regulation, and the statute contained no element that would assure a substantial connection with commerce in each prosecution. *Id.* at 561–62; *see also United States v. Morrison*, 529 U.S. 598, 608–10 (2000) (discussing *Lopez*).

*Lopez’s* analysis demonstrates that § 922(g), like the former § 922(q), is an improper exercise of Congress’s commerce power. Like § 922(q), § 922(g) must be examined under the third “substantial effects” category of commerce legislation, because the statute does not regulate the channels of commerce or things “in” com-

merce. *See Scarborough*, 431 U.S. at 572 (in passing § 922’s predecessor statute, Congress reached more than “simply those possessions that occur in commerce or in interstate facilities”). To meet the requirements of the “substantial effects” category, the statute must either involve commercial activity, or include an interstate commerce element sufficient to provide case-by-case proof of a substantial relation to commerce.

Section 922(g) does neither of these things. First, possession of a firearm by a felon, like possession of a firearm near a school, is noncommercial, noneconomic activity. While firearm possession could lead to violent crime, which in the aggregate could hurt the nation’s economy, Congress may not “regulate non-economic, violent criminal conduct based solely on that conduct’s aggregate effect on interstate commerce.” *Morrison*, 529 U.S. at 617. Second, § 922(g)’s commerce element does not salvage the statute. While *Lopez* suggested that the presence of such a statutory nexus should be considered in determining whether a statute is constitutional, *Lopez* also made clear that, “to be within Congress’ power to regulate it under the Commerce Clause,” the prohibited activity’s effect on commerce must be substantial. 514 U.S. at 559. Accordingly, a commerce element must ensure, “through case-by-case inquiry,” that the regulated activity actually “affects interstate commerce.”

*Id.* at 561. The commerce element of § 922(g) does not do that. The element requires only that the firearm have traveled in interstate commerce at some time in the past. *See Scarborough*, 431 U.S. at 575 (interpreting predecessor statute); *cf. United States v. Rawls*, 85 F.3d 240, 242–43 (5th Cir. 1996) (per curiam) (citing *Scarborough* in § 922(g) case). Even if a gun traveled in interstate commerce sometime in the past, possessing it now has nothing to do with business or commerce. Thus, such possession does not fall within the category of activities that Congress may regulate under the Commerce Clause.

This conclusion is supported by the Court’s decision in *Jones v. United States*, 529 U.S. 848 (2000). *Jones* considered whether the federal arson statute, 18 U.S.C. § 844(i), criminalizes the destruction of private property. 529 U.S. at 850. Section 844(i) contains a jurisdictional element like that in § 922(g), but the Court construed the statute narrowly to limit its reach to arson of property that is “currently used in commerce or in an activity affecting commerce.” *Id.* at 859. In so ruling, the Court noted that a broader construction might render the statute unconstitutional under *Lopez*. *Jones*, 529 U.S. at 858.

Although *Jones*'s analysis turned on the definition of the word "use" in the arson statute—a term absent from the felon-in-possession statute—the case nonetheless has important implications for § 922(g)(1). *Jones* indicated that the mere presence of a jurisdictional element will not save a statute from a Commerce Clause challenge. Instead, that element must be construed, if possible, to bring the statute within the parameters set by the Constitution. *Id.* at 858. And as *Jones* recognized, those parameters were established in *Lopez*. 529 U.S. at 858. Considered together, *Lopez* and *Jones* cast substantial doubt on whether the minimal nexus required in *Scarborough* is enough to make § 922(g)'s a lawful exercise of Congress's commerce power. *See, e.g., United States v. Cortes*, 299 F.3d 1030, 1037 (9th Cir. 2002) ("The vitality of *Scarborough* engenders significant debate."). Even before *Jones*, one Fifth Circuit panel stated that: "If the matter were *res nova*, one might well wonder how it could rationally be concluded that mere possession of a firearm in any meaningful way concerns interstate commerce simply because the firearm had, perhaps decades previously ..., fortuitously traveled in interstate commerce." *Rawls*, 85 F.3d at 243 (Garwood, J., concurring). Another Fifth Circuit judge put it even more forcefully: "the precise holding in *Scarborough* is in fundamental and irreconcilable conflict with the rationale of ...

*Lopez*. ... the ‘minimal nexus’ of *Scarborough* can no longer be deemed sufficient under the *Lopez* requirement of substantially affecting interstate commerce.” *United States v. Kuban*, 94 F.3d 971, 977–78 (5th Cir. 1996) (DeMoss, J., dissenting in part).

The Court should grant certiorari to address the legitimate doubts about the constitutionality of § 922(g). In light of *Lopez* and later decisions, the statute has faced repeated challenges not only in the Fifth Circuit, but throughout the country. *See United States v. Scott*, 263 F.3d 1270, 1274 (11th Cir. 2001) (collecting cases). The prevalence of § 922(g) prosecutions ensures the recurrence of the issue, and litigation will undoubtedly continue unless this Court provides a definitive statement regarding the application of *Lopez’s* principles to this statute. Mince’s case gives the Court an opportunity to do so.

**CONCLUSION**

FOR THESE REASONS, Mince asks this Honorable Court to grant  
a writ of certiorari.

Respectfully submitted.

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