

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

IN THE  
SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

ASHLEY LATREECE THACKERSON — PETITIONER

vs.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, RESPONDENT

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

Involving Case No. 22-10675

**PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI**

/s/Andrew Ottaway, CJA Court-Appointed Lawyer

PO Box 1679, Granbury, Texas 76048

Text/cell 817-559-0466 ; fax 817-579-1104

[ottaway9@swbell.net](mailto:ottaway9@swbell.net) Texas Bar. No. 15342850

## **QUESTION PRESENTED**

**Did the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals err by finding that Petitioner did not qualify for safety valve relief under the First Step Act 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f)?**

**The Court of Appeals in the Ninth Circuit has written an opinion that indicates that Petitioner would qualify for Safety Valve Relief under the new criminal history counting rules in the First Step Act. [US v Lopez, 998 F.3d 2021].**

## **LIST OF PARTIES**

All parties appear in the caption of the case on the cover page.

Ashley Latreece Thackerson is from the Abilene, Texas area.

She was indicted in the San Angelo Division of the Northern District of Texas.

She pled guilty to being a minor participant in a meth distribution indictment in the San Angelo – Abilene area of Texas. The sentencing judge was Mark Pittman of Fort Worth, Texas.

## **RELATED CASES**

There are no related cases.

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**IN THE**  
**SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES**  
**PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI**

Petitioner respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment below.

Petitioner received a ten year sentence for selling about \$1700 worth of meth because the Fifth Circuit ruled that Safety Valve Relief under the First Step Act was not available to the Trial Court. 18 USC § 3553(f).

**OPINIONS BELOW**

The opinion of the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals appears as Appendix A to the petition, pages 8-9. The opinion is unpublished.

**JURISDICTION**

The date on which the United States Court of Appeals decided this case was March 27, 2023. No petition for rehearing was filed in this case.

The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U. S. C. § 1254(1).

**CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED**

Safety valve relief under the new First Step Act, 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f).

## **STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

This is a direct appeal from a final decision of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, San Angelo Division, entering judgment of conviction and imposing a criminal sentence. Petitioner received a ten year prison sentence for selling about \$1700 worth of meth.

Petitioner received a ten year prison sentence for selling about \$1700 worth of meth, having been a very minor participant in a conspiracy indictment involving several other people. The Judge wanted to go below the mandatory minimum.

The District Court Judge from Fort Worth, Texas, entered a written judgment imposing a 120 month term of imprisonment on July 8, 2022, and Appellant filed notice of appeal on July 11, 2022. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the sentence by an unpublished opinion dated March 27, 2023. [Appendix A].

## **REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION**

The Fort Worth Trial Court Judge made several remarks that require explanation and require reading between the lines. The Trial Court Judge makes a great deal of Petitioner's argument, which is that a ten year sentence for selling about \$1700 worth of meth is just wrong. United States v Lopez, 998 F.3d 431 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021), describes an interpretation of counting criminal history points that would make the Petitioner eligible for Safety Valve Relief that the Judge wanted to grant.

The Trial Court Judge stated, [Appendix B, pages 10-14] when he found that he could not grant Safety Valve Relief:

**I think if this doesn't present the case that might need some change or the Fifth Circuit to look at it, I can't think of one.** Record on Appeal at page 212.

Because the Fifth Circuit does not allow Safety Valve Relief for Petitioner, she received a ten year prison sentence for selling about \$1700 worth of meth.

THE COURT: Again, you can't qualify for the -- particularly with where we're going nowadays -- look, I'm not here to talk policy, but republican, democrat, independent, yellow, white, brown, black or blue, there seems to be a consensus nowadays that a lot of these sentences are way too high.

Record on Appeal at 212.

### **CONCLUSION**

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted. No one should receive a ten year prison sentence for selling \$1700 worth of meth.

Respectfully submitted,  
/s/Andrew Ottaway, Lawyer  
PO Box 1679, Granbury, Texas 76048  
Text/cell 817-559-0466; fax 817-579-1104  
[ottaway9@swbell.net](mailto:ottaway9@swbell.net) SBN 15342850

## Certificate of Service

A copy of this document was served upon:

Chad E. Meacham, United States Attorney, Northern District of Texas

Ryan P. Niedermair, Assistant United States Attorney

Dated: 5/20/2023 /s/Andrew Ottaway

# United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit

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No. 22-10675  
Summary Calendar

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United States Court of Appeals  
Fifth Circuit  
**FILED**  
March 27, 2023

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Lyle W. Cayce  
Clerk

*Plaintiff—Appellee,*

*versus*

ASHLEY LATREECE THACKERSON,

*Defendant—Appellant.*

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Appeal from the United States District Court  
for the Northern District of Texas  
USDC No. 6:21-CR-58-13

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Before HIGGINBOTHAM, GRAVES, and Ho, *Circuit Judges*.

PER CURIAM:\*

Ashley Latreece Thackerson appeals the sentence imposed following her guilty plea conviction for conspiracy to distribute and possess 50 grams or more of methamphetamine with intent to distribute. Relying on *United States v. Lopez*, 998 F.3d 431 (9th Cir. 2021), Thackerson argues that she is eligible for safety valve relief under 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f) and that her statutory

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\* This opinion is not designated for publication. See 5TH CIR. R. 47.5.

No. 22-10675

mandatory minimum prison term of 120 months should be vacated. The Government has filed an opposed motion for summary affirmance or, in the alternative, for an extension of time to file an appellate brief.

Thackerson's argument is now foreclosed by our recent decision in *United States v. Palomares*, 52 F.4th 640 (5th Cir. 2022), *petition for cert. filed* (U.S. Dec. 21, 2022) (No. 22-6391). Because Thackerson ran afoul of § 3553(f)(1)(B)'s requirement that she not have a prior three-point criminal offense, she was ineligible for relief under § 3553(f). *See Palomares*, 52 F.4th at 647.

In light of the foregoing, the judgment of the district court is AFFIRMED. The Government's motion for summary affirmance and alternative motion for an extension of time to file a brief are DENIED. *See United States v. Bailey*, 924 F.3d 1289, 1290 (5th Cir. 2019).

1                   **THE COURT:** Okay. Did you have a chance to review  
2 all three of those with your client?

3                   **MR. OTTAWAY:** Yes.

4                   **THE COURT:** All right.

5                   Mr. Haag, did the Government receive those in a  
6 timely manner?

7                   **MR. HAAG:** Yes, Your Honor, it did.

8                   **THE COURT:** Okay. Let's pick up where we left off a  
9 couple of months ago.

10                  Mr. Haag, are you going to stand on the objection  
11 that was filed earlier?

12                  **MR. HAAG:** Yes, Your Honor, I will, as far as the  
13 safety valve.

14                  **THE COURT:** No, as far as the one that Juanita filed  
15 on the -- how the numbers were calculated.

16                  **MR. HAAG:** No, Your Honor. I'll, at this time,  
17 withdraw that objection.

18                  **THE COURT:** All right. Thank you.

19                  So, the order (sic) that we have before us today is  
20 a motion for downward departure or variance that was filed by  
21 Ms. Thackerson with regards to whether the First Step Act  
22 applied in her case or not, and I allowed you guys to do some  
23 briefing on it.

24                  I want to make some very candid comments, and  
25 perhaps you-all can convince me otherwise. But we have an

1 offense here that carries a minimum ten-year offense (*sic*).  
2 The evidence, at least that I have before me in my presentence  
3 report, Mr. Ottaway, is that she purchased, what, a little  
4 under \$2,000 worth of methamphetamine?

5 **MR. OTTAWAY:** Ordered on Facebook messenger or  
6 something and paid by PayPal.

7 **THE COURT:** Like \$1,700?

8 **MR. OTTAWAY:** Yes, sir. They got us cold on the  
9 elements.

10 **THE COURT:** She's got a criminal conviction that  
11 goes back to 2011 for theft of copper wire. Now, I'm not a  
12 lifelong drug prosecutor, but I do seem to believe that most  
13 of the time that's addicts stealing copper wire to pay for  
14 their addiction. But nonetheless, she has that crime on her  
15 criminal history when she was 22, bringing her into a category  
16 II criminal history on a 10-year-old crime, \$1,700 worth of  
17 methamphetamine.

18 You filed a motion that the First Step Act  
19 qualifies. This is one of those cases where I have to do  
20 something I don't agree with. I think that ten years is a  
21 hell of a lot of time for what I have before me. I wish that  
22 I could waive a magic wand and say that the First Step Act  
23 applies, but under my oath I am bound to follow the law, even  
24 when I don't like the outcome. And the minute that I stop  
25 doing that I need to resign or have Congress impeach me.

1                   I am left with no choice, unless you can convince me  
2 otherwise, based on the law, than to deny the motion for  
3 relief under the safety valve. And I hope you explain to your  
4 counsel -- I mean, to your client, this does not mean she's  
5 not left with any other avenues, whether it be appealing my  
6 decision today to the Fifth Circuit, whether it be filing any  
7 appropriate motions for compassionate release or the like,  
8 it's something that we consider all the time.

9                   But empathy is not supposed to be something as a  
10 judge that I use to guide my decisions, I'm guided by the law.  
11 And for better or worse my hands are tied in this situation.

12                   **MR. OTTAWAY:** We understand, Judge.

13                   **THE COURT:** Do you have any additional argument  
14 you'd like to make? I'd like for you to be able to preserve  
15 your record.

16                   **MR. OTTAWAY:** Well, Judge, we think --

17                   **THE COURT:** And I think it will be a good one for  
18 the Fifth Circuit to look at.

19                   **MR. OTTAWAY:** We think the First Step Act would  
20 apply to this, because it really is a considerable change in  
21 the sentencing policy. We think that you have discretion to  
22 apply that and allow the safety valve relief.

23                   **THE COURT:** All right.

24                   Mr. Haag, would you like to respond?

25                   **MR. HAAG:** Your Honor, just briefly.

1                   I do agree with the Court, this is an issue that is,  
2 indeed, subject to different interpretation. The Ninth  
3 Circuit, it would agree with Mr. Ottaway. The Eleventh  
4 Circuit just recently debriefed en banc and they're going to  
5 address this issue en banc. So, it certainly is an issue  
6 that's unsettled.

7                   We do believe that the better opinion is those  
8 reflected in the Government's briefing and district courts  
9 that basically say that this defendant is disqualified from  
10 the safety valve because of that prior three-point conviction.

11                  **THE COURT:** You know, I used to be on the Court of  
12 Appeals, and the same is true that bad facts make bad law, but  
13 it's also true that good facts make good law. I would highly  
14 encourage you-all to appeal this. I think if this doesn't  
15 present the case that might need some change or the Fifth  
16 Circuit to look at it, I can't think of one.

17                  **MR. OTTAWAY:** We certainly intend to, Judge.

18                  **THE COURT:** Again, you can't qualify for the --  
19 particularly with where we're going nowadays -- look, I'm not  
20 hear to talk policy, but republican, democrat, independent,  
21 yellow, white, brown, black or blue, there seems to be a  
22 consensus nowadays that a lot of these sentences are way too  
23 high.

24                  We just had a republican president that signed the  
25 most sweeping reform with criminal justice in decades, since

1 the '90s. But if buying \$1,700 worth of methamphetamine over  
2 the Facebook gets you ten years with a 10-year-old crime for  
3 stealing copper wire and a consistent history of drug  
4 addiction of methamphetamine doesn't, then I think the Fifth  
5 Circuit needs to make that decision. But I'm bound by my  
6 oath.

7 **MR. OTTAWAY:** We understand.

8 **THE COURT:** Again, it's not the only avenue, okay?

9 **MR. OTTAWAY:** She has lots of medical problems, so  
10 we'll be doing a compassionate release after this also.

11 **THE COURT:** I think that might be a good idea.

12 But again, for better or worse, how I personally  
13 feel about these cases is not the guidestone that I've taken  
14 up as a judge. And I try to do my best, even in cases that I  
15 don't agree with. Sometimes you have to do that. So if you  
16 didn't, you wouldn't be doing your job as a judge.

17 Therefore, I'm going to be denying the motion filed  
18 by the defense for relief under the safety valve.

19 Let me make the following findings, in light of my  
20 denial of defense's motion. I will adopt as my final findings  
21 of fact the statements of fact made in the presentence report,  
22 subject to and including the changes and qualifications made  
23 by the addendum to the presentence report and that I made in  
24 response to the motion filed on behalf of defendant by  
25 Mr. Ottaway in the presentence report that I've just denied --