

No. _____

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

GUSTAVO LAZCANO-NERIA,
Petitioner,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Respondent.

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

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QUESTION PRESENTED

The government prosecuted Gustavo-Lazcano-Neria under a statute with undisputed racist origins. Congress criminalized illegal entry, as well as illegal reentry, into the United States in 1929 at the urging of “proud” white supremacists, nativists, and eugenicists to keep the American bloodline “white and purely Caucasian.” The core focus of these provisions has remained substantively the same since 1929. But the Ninth Circuit upheld the law based on a reenactment in 1952 and amendments in the 1980s and 1990s, none of which grappled with the law’s racist past.

This case poses important questions about the role of appellate courts in applying the framework from *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation*, 429 U.S. 252 (1977), to a federal law used for a large swath of federal criminal prosecutions, along with countless civil rights cases.

The question presented is:

Whether a legislature can cleanse the taint of a racially discriminatory law by silent reenactment or amendment when the law was originally adopted for an impermissible discriminatory purpose.

PARTIES, RELATED PROCEEDINGS, AND RULE 29.6 STATEMENT

The prior proceedings for this case are found at:

United States v. Lazcano-Neria, No. 22-50068, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, memorandum decision affirming conviction (attached as Appendix A).

United States v. Lazcano-Neria, No. 22-50068, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, order denying the petition for panel rehearing and rehearing en banc (attached as Appendix B)

The memorandum decision relied on *United States v. Carrillo-Lopez*, 68 F.4th 1133 (9th Cir. 2023). Accordingly, Mr. Lazcano-Neria includes the related proceedings in *Carrillo-Lopez* in this Appendix:

United States v. Carrillo-Lopez, 555 F. Supp. 3d 996 (D. Nev. 2021) (attached at Appendix C).

United States v. Carrillo-Lopez, 68 F.4th 1133 (9th Cir. 2023) (attached as Appendix D).

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A.	<i>United States v. Lazcano-Neria</i> , U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Memorandum decision affirming conviction, filed April 4, 2024
B.	<i>United States v. Lazcano-Neria</i> , U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Order denying petition for panel rehearing and rehearing en banc, filed June 13, 2024
C.	<i>United States v. Carrillo-Lopez</i> , 555 F. Supp. 3d 996 (D. Nev. 2021), filed August 18, 2021
D.	<i>United States v. Carrillo-Lopez</i> , 68 F.4th 1133 (9th Cir. 2023), filed May 22, 2023

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

GUSTAVO LAZCANO-NERIA,
Petitioner,

- v. -

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Respondent.

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

Petitioner Gustavo-Lazcano-Neria respectfully prays that the Court issue a writ of certiorari to review the memorandum decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit entered on April 4, 2024, and the order denying rehearing and rehearing en banc entered on June 13, 2024.

INTRODUCTION

“The world is not made brand new every morning[.]” *McCreary Cnty. v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 866 (2005). In recognition of this concept, this Court’s precedent requires lower courts to look beyond the plain language of a statute to its history to determine whether it violates equal protection principles. *See Vill. of Arlington Heights v. Metro. Hous. Dev. Corp.*, 429 U.S. 252, 266–68 (1977). And history is not limited to the current version of a statute—courts must look to previous enactments as part of the inquiry into discriminatory animus. *See Espinoza v. Mont. Dep’t of Revenue*, 591 U.S. 464, 467, 480–82 (2020); *Ramos v.*

Louisiana, 140 S. Ct. 1390, 1394, 1401 & n.44, 1417–18 (2020); *Hunter v. Underwood*, 471 U.S. 222, 227–29, 233 (1985).

Disagreement has developed in lower courts about this precedent. Some courts look for similarities between an original statute and the challenged version; when enough similarity exists, particularly when the legislature has done nothing to remedy past infirmities, the test in these circuits allows for consideration of the original legislature’s intent. But other courts—like the Ninth Circuit here—largely ignore the statute’s history, even the type of historical background *Arlington Heights* explicitly allows. Specifically, although Congress enacted a racially discriminatory law, then reenacted it without debate under a new name, the Ninth Circuit looked only to the silent reenactment, holding the district court clearly erred in finding intentional discrimination.

“‘The Constitution deals with substance, not shadows,’ and the prohibition against racial discrimination is ‘levelled at the thing, not the name.’” *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard Coll.*, 600 U.S. 181, 230 (2023) (quoting *Cummings v. Missouri*, 71 U.S. 277, 325 (1866)). This Court should grant certiorari review to resolve lower court disagreement about the relevance of the original enactment under the *Arlington Heights* framework. See U.S. Sup. Ct. R. 10(a), (c).

OPINION BELOW

On April 4, 2024, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit affirmed Mr. Lazcano-Neria's conviction based, in part, on *United States v. Carrillo-Lopez*, 68 F.4th 1133 (9th Cir. 2023). *See* Appendix A.

JURISDICTION

On April 4, 2024, the Ninth Circuit affirmed Mr. Lazcano-Neria's conviction in an unpublished memorandum decision. *See* Appendix A. On June 13, 2024, the same three-judge panel denied Mr. Lazcano-Neria's petition for rehearing and rehearing en banc. *See* Appendix B. This Court thus has jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

STATEMENT OF FACTS

In October 2020, Mr. Lazcano-Neria was arrested and charged with illegally reentering the United States under 8 U.S.C. § 1325. Before trial, he filed a motion to dismiss the complaint, alleging that § 1325 violates equal protection under *Arlington Heights*. The magistrate judge denied the motion to dismiss, and Mr. Lazcano-Neria proceeded to trial. On November 5, 2020, Mr. Lazcano-Neria was convicted at a bench trial and was sentenced to time served. He then appealed his conviction to the district court. The district court entered an order denying Mr. Lazcano-Neria's appeal and affirming his conviction. Mr. Lazcano-Neria then appealed to the Ninth Circuit.

While Mr. Lazcano-Neria's appeal was pending, a district court judge in Nevada granted a similar motion in *United States v. Carrillo-Lopez*, 555 F. Supp. 3d

996 (D. Nev. 2021). *See* Appendix C. In *Carrillo-Lopez*, the district court had held that a defendant charged with § 1326 (a statute with the same historical background as § 1325) had shown that racial animus was a “motivating factor” in Congress’s original passage and reenactment of the statute.

Relying on uncontroverted expert testimony and historical records, the Nevada district court detailed the anti-Latino discriminatory and racial animus that propelled the Act of 1929. For example, the Act of 1929 was introduced after “a House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization hearing on ‘The Eugenical Aspects of Deportation’ included testimony from principal witness Dr. Harry H. Laughlin, a well-known eugenicist who suggested that ‘immigration control is the greatest instrument which the Federal Government can use in promoting race conservation of the Nation’” and “compared drafters of deportation laws to ‘successful breeders of thoroughbred horses.’” The Chairman of the House Immigration and Naturalization Committee “advocated for Congress’s use of ‘the principle of applied eugenics’ to reduce crime by ‘debarring and deporting’ people.” And “[d]uring debate on the bill in the House, representatives made similar racist remarks, including testimony from Representative Fitzgerald who argued that Mexicans were ‘poisoning the American citizen’ because they were of a ‘very undesirable’ class.” These nativist representatives “were furious in Congress” that agricultural and industrial employers defeated previous efforts to place quotas on Mexican workers, and “sought to pursue [nativism] through other means which ultimately led to the Act of 1929 which criminalizes unlawful entry and reentry.”

The government in *Carrillo-Lopez* conceded that “the Act of 1929 was motivated by racial animus.” The district court thus concluded that “[t]he evidence clearly indicates, as both parties and other district courts agree, that the Act of 1929 was passed during a time when nativism and eugenics were widely accepted, both in the country at large and by Congress, and that these racist theories ultimately fueled the Act’s passage.” The district court also found the government did not prove the law would have been enacted absent racial animus. Because the government failed to meet its burden under *Arlington Heights*, the district court dismissed the indictment against Mr. Carrillo-Lopez.

By 1952, several of the same 1929 legislators held positions of authority in Congress and the White House. They faced a crucial choice about the future of illegal reentry: (1) carry forward the illegal reentry provision without debate, including any discussion of its known discriminatory purpose and effect; (2) debate the provision and reenact it; or (3) repeal it. Congress chose the first option. Congress reenacted Section 1326 as part of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, Pub. L. No. 82-414, § 276, 66 Stat. 229. President Truman vetoed the INA because of its discriminatory provisions. Congress overrode the veto, including yea votes by several congressmen remaining in office since 1929, and Section 1326 took effect June 27, 1952.

Applying a presumption of good faith to the 1952 reenacting legislature, the *Carrillo-Lopez* district court found the law was reenacted in 1952 without addressing its discriminatory intent and without substantive change. In addition,

the district court found that the 1952 reenactment was accompanied by independent discriminatory intent. Thus, the district court found that Carrillo-Lopez had sufficiently rebutted the presumption of legislative good faith. Four findings by the district court are relevant here.

First, the *Carrillo-Lopez* district court found the 1952 Congressional silence on Section 1326 telling in light of “robust debate on other provisions” of the INA. Because Congress had the opportunity to address the law’s improper motivation but chose to remain silent, that Congressional silence “weighs in favor” of finding continued discriminatory intent.

Second, the *Carrillo-Lopez* district court found that the 1952 Congress reenacted the statute without substantive changes: “[T]he 1952 Congress adopted Section 1326 almost wholesale from the Act of 1929, revising it only to make it more punitive.” The reenactment carried forward almost identical language: “Any alien who—(1) has been arrested and deported or excluded and deported, and thereafter (2) enters, attempts to enter, or is any time found in, the United States . . . shall be guilty of a felony[.]” Relying on this Court’s holding in *Abbott v. Perez*, 585 U.S. 579 (2018), “that how the reenacting legislature responds to a prior discriminatory statute is probative of the reenacting legislature’s intent,” the district court found the 1952 reenactment of Section 1326 did not substantially alter or address the prior discriminatory intent.

Third, the *Carrillo-Lopez* district court thoroughly examined the legislative history, executive actions such as President Truman’s overridden veto of the INA,

contemporaneous legislation such as the “Wetback Bill,” and Congressional awareness of disparate impact on Latino persons as evidence of independent discriminatory intent in the 1952 reenactment. The court concluded that “[t]he totality of evidence shows that the same factors motivating the passage of Section 1326 in 1929 were present in 1952. . . . Although it is ‘not easy’ to prove that racism motivated the passage of a particular statute, the Court reasons that it cannot be impossible, or *Arlington Heights* would stand for nothing.”

Fourth, the *Carrillo-Lopez* district court found this legislative history distinguished this case from others with amended or reenacted laws. “While the *Hayden*,¹ *Cotton*,² and *Johnson*³ legislatures were expressly revising felon-disenfranchisement laws to make them more race-neutral, the 1952 Congress did not depart from the original enactment of Section 1326 and instead adopted it in its entirety into the INA.” And Congress’s adoption of Section 1326 “happened at a time that Congress did not appear to be overly concerned with its animus toward Mexican and Latinx people, but instead welcomed racist epithets.” Thus, the court concluded “*Carrillo-Lopez* has demonstrated that the 1952 reenactment not only failed to reconcile with the racial animus of the Act of 1929, but was further embroiled by contemporary racial animus and discriminatory intent.”

The *Carrillo-Lopez* district court examined each of the five amendments to Section 1326 since its 1952 reenactment—in 1988, 1990, 1994, and twice in 1996—

¹ *Hayden v. Paterson*, 594 F.3d 150 (2d Cir. 2010).

² *Cotton v. Fordice*, 157 F.3d 388 (5th Cir. 1998).

³ *Johnson v. Governor of Fla.*, 405 F.3d 1214 (11th Cir. 2005) (en banc).

and found the amendments were non-substantive, as they “did not change the operation of Section 1326, but instead served to increase financial and carceral penalties.”⁴ And the district court additionally found for each amendment that “there has been no attempt [by Congress] at any point to grapple with the racist history of Section 1326 or remove its influence on the legislation.” Relying on two recent concurrences from this Court as persuasive and instructional, the district court concluded the “legislature’s failure to confront a provision’s racist past may keep it ‘tethered to its original bias.’” (quoting *Espinoza v. Mont. Dept of Revenue*, 591 U.S. at 507 (Alito, J., concurring), and citing *Ramos v. Louisiana*, 140 S. Ct. 1390, 1410 (2020) (Sotomayor, J., concurring)). Thus, the Nevada district court concluded that “the government fails to demonstrate how any subsequent amending Congress addressed either the racism that initially motivated the Act of 1929 or the discriminatory intent that was contemporaneous with the 1952 reenactment.”

The government appealed the Nevada decision, and the Ninth Circuit reversed. It concluded that the *Carrillo-Lopez* district court clearly erred in finding discriminatory intent and reversed dismissal of the indictment. *See* Appendix D. In several places in the opinion, the Ninth Circuit discounted evidence of discriminatory animus surrounding the original 1929 criminalization of illegal reentry, holding that the history of the 1929 statute “lacks probative value for

⁴ The 1988 amendment increased imprisonment time. The 1990 amendment removed a monetary cap on financial penalties. The 1994 amendment increased potential prison time for felony convictions. And the 1996 amendments “added a penalty for those convicted of reentry while on parole, probation, or supervised release.”

determining the motivation of the legislature that enacted the INA”: *see also* Appx D (“[T]he views of an earlier legislature are generally not probative of the intent of a later legislature, particularly when the subsequent legislature has a substantially different composition[.]” (internal quotation marks and citations omitted)); (“[U]nless historical evidence is reasonably contemporaneous with the challenged decision, it has little probative value.”) (quoting *McCleskey v. Kemp*, 481 U.S. 279, 298 n.20 (1987)); (“The history of the INA began in 1947[.]”). And the court, looking only to the 1952 legislature, found insufficient evidence of discriminatory animus to sustain the dismissal.

After the Ninth Circuit issued its decision in *Carrillo-Lopez*, the Ninth Circuit rejected Mr. Lazcano-Neria’s same equal protection, citing *Carrillo-Lopez*. This petition follows.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

I.

Certiorari review is necessary to resolve the circuit split arising from differing applications of *Arlington Heights* to amended and reenacted statutes.

With its decision here, the Ninth Circuit has deepened a circuit split about the proper application of the *Arlington Heights* framework when the challenged statute has been amended or reenacted. Because this split involves the interpretation of this Court’s precedent, including cases in recent terms, certiorari review is appropriate. *See* Sup. Ct. R. 10(a), (c).

A. This Court’s cases look to the original enactment of a statute to determine discriminatory intent.

Acknowledging the insidious nature of race discrimination, *Arlington Heights* provided the framework for determining whether racial animus motivated a facially neutral statute. Trial courts must engage in “a sensitive inquiry into such circumstantial and direct evidence of intent as may be available,” examining, inter alia, the disparate impact, legislative history, and historical background of a law. *Arlington Heights*, 429 U.S. at 266–67. And because legislatures are “[r]arely . . . motivated solely by a single concern,” it is enough to show that racial discrimination was “a motivating factor,” even if it was not the only—or even the primary—concern. *Id.* at 265–66 (emphasis added). The appellate court’s role on appeal is deferential, so long as the district court did not clearly err.

Arlington Heights did not address how to apply its framework when a statute has been reenacted, amended, or otherwise modified by a later legislature or court. But in a trio of cases after *Arlington Heights*, the Court considered that issue, ruling in each case that the intent of the original legislature controlled the analysis.

First, *Hunter v. Underwood*, 471 U.S. 222, 227–29 (1985), considered Alabama’s facially neutral voter disenfranchisement law, which was adopted in 1901 at a constitutional convention explicitly held to “establish white supremacy in this State.” In the next decades, courts struck down “[s]ome of the more blatantly discriminatory selections.” *Id.* at 233. Writing for a unanimous Court, Chief Justice Rehnquist rejected the argument the Ninth Circuit relied on here—that the changes since the original enactment rendered the original history irrelevant. Instead, the

Court looked to the continuing impact of the statute, reasoning that “its original enactment was motivated by a desire to discriminate against blacks on account of race and the section continues to this day to have that effect.” *Id.* at 233; *see also Abbott v. Perez*, 585 U.S. 579, 603–04 (2018) (explaining that *Hunter* rejected the argument that amendments rendered law constitutional “because the amendments did not alter the intent with which the article, including the parts that remained, had been adopted”); *United States v. Fordice*, 505 U.S. 717, 728 (1992) (“[A] State does not discharge its constitutional obligations until it eradicates policies and practices traceable to its [explicitly segregated system].”).

The Court continues to examine history—including prior versions of a law—when determining whether government action is constitutional. In *Ramos v. Louisiana*, 140 S. Ct. 1390, 1394 (2020), the Court considered the constitutionality of Louisiana’s nonunanimous jury verdict system, originally developed at a Constitutional Convention convened for the “avowed purpose” of “establish[ing] the supremacy of the white race.” Many years later, Louisiana readopted nonunanimous jury rules without mentioning race. *Id.* at 1426 (Alito, J., dissenting). But *Ramos*’s plurality still analyzed “the racially discriminatory reasons” for adopting the “rule[] in the first place,” explaining its “respect for ‘rational and civil discourse’” could not excuse “leaving an uncomfortable past unexamined.” *Id.* at 1401 & n.44, 1417–18. Those discriminatory reasons led the plurality to reject Justice Alito’s dissenting opinion that recodification of the jury non-unanimity rule cleansed it of its racist origins. *Id.* As the plurality explained, in

“assess[ing] the functional benefits” of a law, courts cannot “ignore the very functions those rules were”—at inception—“adopted to serve.” *Id.* at 1401 & n.44; *see also id.* at 1410 (Sotomayor, J., concurring) (explaining a legislature does not purge discriminatory taint unless the law “otherwise is untethered to racial bias—and perhaps also where a legislature actually confronts a law’s tawdry past in reenacting it”).

The Court reached a similar conclusion in *Espinoza v. Mont. Dep’t of Revenue*, 591 U.S. at 467, which considered the Montana Supreme Court’s decision to exclude religious schools from the state scholarship program. Writing for the Court, Chief Justice Roberts discussed the “checkered tradition” and “shameful pedigree” of similar religious exclusions, born of anti-Catholic bigotry in the 1870s. *Id.* at 2258–59. Like Louisiana’s nonunanimous jury system, Montana reenacted its religious exclusion in the 1970s, purportedly “for reasons unrelated to anti-Catholic bigotry.” *Id.* But the Court again considered the original enactment a relevant consideration in its analysis. *Id.*

Justice Alito, unlike in *Ramos*, joined the majority opinion. But he also wrote separately about the same issue here—the relevance of history. *Id.* at 2267–74 (Alito, J., concurring). Although Justice Alito would have struck down the provision under the Free Exercise Clause regardless of its discriminatory past, he also recognized “the provision’s origin is relevant under . . . *Ramos*[.]” *Id.* at 2267 (Alito, J., concurring). Justice Alito had argued in his *Ramos* dissent “that this original motivation, though deplorable, had no bearing on the laws’ constitutionality,” but he

acknowledged “[he] lost, and *Ramos* is now precedent.” *Id.* at 2268 (Alito, J., concurring). Thus, under *Ramos*, Justice Alito concurred to elaborate on the original anti-Catholic motivation for Montana’s ban. *Id.* at 2268–74.

These cases teach that a statute’s prior versions, when known to be motivated by racial animus, infect the current version unless the legislature actively confronts the statute’s racist past and chooses to reenact it for race-neutral reasons notwithstanding that history. Comprehensively viewing the total efforts behind a law reveals the ongoing history of discriminatory intent and the need to grapple with such “insidious and pervasive evil” that drove the law. *See South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, 383 U.S. 301, 309 (1966) (detailing how “Congress explored with great care the problem of racial discrimination in voting” when passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965). A legislature’s reenactment cannot be examined in a vacuum. Assessing the constitutionality of a reenactment requires a comprehensive look at the entire history, particularly when the government concedes the racist origin of the law. *See, e.g., McCreary Cnty.*, 545 U.S. at 866 (“The world is not made brand new every morning[.]”); *Fordice*, 505 U.S. at 728 (“[A] State does not discharge its constitutional obligations until it eradicates policies and practices traceable to its [explicitly segregated system].”).

Abbott—on which the Ninth Circuit relied to hold the opposite—follows this principle. In *Abbott*, the Court considered Texas’s redistricting plans, enacted in 2013 after a court determined prior plans were unconstitutionally discriminatory. *Abbott*, 585 U.S. at 583. The Court rejected the argument that the 2013 plans

merely carried forward the discriminatory intent from the earlier plans. *Id.* at 2313–14. But the Court did not rule that evidence of a prior legislature’s intent was always irrelevant—just the opposite. The prior legislature’s intent was relevant “to the extent that [it] naturally give[s] rise to—or tend[s] to refute—inferences regarding the intent of the 2013 Legislature.” *Id.* There, the prior legislature’s intent did not give rise to an inference about the 2013 legislature because the prior legislature’s redistricting plan was *not* reenacted in 2013. *Id.* at 2325. Instead, the 2013 legislature adopted plans from a Texas court. *Id.* at 2316. Although the Texas court used the prior legislative plans as a starting point, it was directed by this Court to modify those plans to remove any “legal defects” under the Constitution and Voting Rights Act. *Id.* at 2316 (quoting *Perry v. Perez*, 565 U.S. 388, 394 (2012)). Unlike here, the 2013 legislature did not simply carry forward the past legislature’s racial animus by silently reenacting a discriminatory bill. It instead adopted a plan that, at this Court’s instruction, had been cleansed of racial animus by a lower court. Thus, *Abbott* is entirely consistent with *Hunter*, *Ramos*, and *Espinoza*.

When a legislature takes steps to remedy past discrimination, that discrimination no longer taints current legislation. But when a legislature fails to take those steps, silently amending or reenacting a discriminatory law, the intent of the original discriminatory legislature continues to be relevant.

B. The circuits are split on how to apply this precedent to reenactments and amended statutes.

In response to the Court’s cases, two divergent tests have developed in the circuits. Some circuits hold that prior discrimination can be ignored only if there are

“significant” or substantive changes after a deliberative process. Other circuits do not examine the extent of any changes or the legislature’s deliberation, instead ignoring the original enactment and focusing only on the current version. Only the former test is supported by this Court’s precedent.

1. The Second, Fourth, and Eleventh Circuits consider whether the legislature substantively changed the law during a deliberative process.

The Second Circuit addressed the reenactment issue in *Hayden v. Peterson*, 594 F.3d 150 (2d Cir. 2010), which considered New York’s felon disenfranchisement provision. The Second Circuit held the plaintiffs had sufficiently alleged discriminatory animus surrounded disenfranchisement provisions from 1821, 1846, and 1874. *Id.* at 164–65. But the plaintiffs were challenging the 1894 provision and did not specifically introduce evidence of discrimination surrounding that provision’s passage. *Id.* at 165–66. The Second Circuit held that was insufficient to state a claim when the 1894 provision “substantive[ly] amend[ed]” the previous provisions. *Id.* at 166–67. The appellate court explicitly distinguished the type of situation here—where a legislature silently reenacts a discriminatory provision “without significant change,” as, among other reasons, “the 1894 amendment was not only deliberative, but was also substantive in scope.” *Id.* at 167.

The Eleventh Circuit reached the same conclusion addressing felony disenfranchisement provisions in Alabama and Florida. In *Johnson v. Governor of State of Fla.*, 405 F.3d 1214, 1223–27 (11th Cir. 2005) (en banc), the court of appeals assumed the 1868 disenfranchisement provision was motivated by racial discrimination but held Florida’s reenactment of the provision in 1968 cleansed any

prior discriminatory animus. Like New York’s reenactment, Florida reenacted its disenfranchisement provision during a deliberative process, where it was considered by different legislative committees and underwent substantive amendments. *Id.* at 1224–25. The Eleventh Circuit then relied on *Johnson in Thompson v. Sec’y of State for the State of Ala.*, 65 F.4th 1288, 1298–300 (11th Cir. 2023), to uphold Alabama’s felon disenfranchisement provision, which, again, was substantively altered during a deliberative process.

Lastly, in *N.C. State Conf. of the NAACP v. Raymond*, 981 F.3d 295 (4th Cir. 2020), the Fourth Circuit considered North Carolina’s 2018 voter-ID law, passed after a 2013 voter-ID law was struck down as discriminatory. The Fourth Circuit approved the 2018 law, finding several substantive differences between it and the previous version. *Id.* at 299–300, 302–11. Unlike the 2013 law, no procedural irregularities accompanied passage of the 2018 law. *Id.* at 305–06. The legislature in fact debated and remedied some infirmities that led the Fourth Circuit to invalidate the 2013 statute. *Id.* at 307–09. Particularly important to the Fourth Circuit, the 2018 statute included provisions mitigating the impact of the ID requirement on minority voters, which was lacking from the 2013 law. *Id.* at 309–10.

This approach finds support in this Court’s precedent. In *Abbott*, on which *Raymond* heavily relied, this Court considered changes the legislature made after a statute was deemed invalid. Because those changes went to the heart of the constitutional infirmities and were specifically designed to rectify the problems, this

Court upheld the modified version of the statute, explaining that past discrimination cannot forever taint government action. *Abbott*, 585 U.S. at 603-04. In this way, legislatures can enact constitutional statutes despite discriminatory animus previously infecting similar policies. See *Raymond*, 981 F.3d at 307–10 (approving measures taken by North Carolina legislature to remedy problems that made previous version of law unconstitutional); cf. *Trump v. Hawaii*, 585 U.S. 667, 706 (2018) (approving immigration policy after changes under court orders blocking previous policies). But as this Court explained in *Abbott*, the changes must “alter the intent with which the article, including the parts that remained, had been adopted.” *Id.* at 2325 (distinguishing *Hunter*). Thus, when the legislature takes no action to remedy infirmities, *Abbott* does not apply.

2. The Fifth and Ninth Circuits exclusively analyze the current version of the challenged statute.

In contrast to the searching inquiry of the Second, Fourth, and Eleventh Circuits, the Fifth and Ninth Circuits focus only on the current version of the statute. If the statute’s challenger cannot show discrimination by the legislature that enacted or reenacted the current version, it is immaterial whether previous iterations were motivated by discriminatory animus. By narrowly viewing each iteration of the same law as a separate entity, these Circuits do not encapsulate the complete circumstances of legislative intent.

In its decision here, the Ninth Circuit disavowed reliance on evidence surrounding the 1929 criminalization of illegal reentry into the United States. The Fifth Circuit reached the same conclusion in *United States v. Barcenas-Rumualdo*,

53 F.4th 859, 865–67 (5th Cir. 2022), holding that its review of Section 1326’s constitutionality was limited to “the history surrounding the INA and the INA’s disproportionate impact on Mexican and Latino immigrants.”⁵ In neither case does the court perform the analysis from this Court’s decision in *Abbott*, or from the Second, Fourth, and Eleventh Circuits, looking to the deliberative process and similarities between the two versions of the statute.

As other petitioners have recently argued in this Court, this position—by both the Fifth Circuit and the Ninth Circuit—conflicts with precedent from this Court. *Petition for Writ of Certiorari, Harness v. Watson*, No. 22-412, 2022 WL 16699076 (U.S. Oct. 28, 2022); *Petition for Writ of Certiorari, Nolasco-Ariza v. United States*, No. 23-5275 (U.S. Aug. 1, 2023). Because it also conflicts with precedent from other circuits, certiorari review is appropriate to resolve the split and provide the proper test for applying *Arlington Heights* to amended and reenacted statutes. *See Harness v. Watson*, 143 S. Ct. 2426, 2426–28 (2023) (Jackson, J., joined by Sotomayor, J., dissenting from the denial of certiorari).

⁵ That holding relied on the Fifth Circuit’s prior decision in *Harness v. Watson*, 47 F.4th 296 (5th Cir. 2022) (en banc), *cert. denied*, 143 S. Ct. 2426 (2023). In *Harness*, a deeply divided en banc court rejected a challenge to Mississippi’s felon disenfranchisement provision, looking only to the reenactment of the provision, not its original adoption. *Id.* at 303–07; *see also Cotton v. Fordice*, 157 F.3d 388, 391 (5th Cir. 1998).

II.
Certiorari is necessary to resolve tension between this Court’s
***Arlington Heights* precedent and the decisions from the**
Fifth Circuit and Ninth Circuit.

The Fifth and Ninth Circuits do not only split from other circuits—they conflict with this Court’s precedent. This precedent requires district courts, as factfinders, to consider the historical background of a law as part of its totality-of-the-circumstances analysis. *Arlington Heights*, 429 U.S. at 265–66. Appellate courts, under this precedent, must defer to the district court’s factfinding. *See Abbott*, 585 U.S. at 607; *Anderson v. Bessemer City*, 470 U.S. 564, 573 (1985). But the Ninth Circuit’s decision did not defer to the district court’s factfinding in *Carrillo-Lopez*, instead relying on its own judgment of limited, piecemeal evidence to reverse dismissal of the indictment. And more generally, the Fifth Circuit’s and Ninth Circuit’s interpretation of *Arlington Heights* and its progeny insulate statutes from historical review by ignoring past history, elevating the presumption of “legislative good faith” to a per se rule anytime a statute is silently reenacted or amended. This application of *Arlington Heights* thus conflicts with cases from this Court, and certiorari review is necessary. *See* Sup. Ct. R. 10(c).

This Court’s precedent applies a presumption of legislative good faith. *Abbott*, 585 U.S. at 607. Because of this presumption, a law’s challenger has the burden of establishing discriminatory intent. *Id.* at 603. But, as the district court in *Carrillo-Lopez* recognized, “that presumption is not insurmountable.” *See also Abbott*, 585 U.S. at 607 (presumption is not “unassailable”). A party may rebut the presumption of legislative good faith through not only contemporaneous discriminatory intent

but by prior unconstitutional intent left unaddressed. Assessing the constitutionality of a reenactment requires a comprehensive look at the entire history, particularly when the government concedes the racist origin of the law. *See, e.g., Fordice*, 505 U.S. at 728 (“[A] State does not discharge its constitutional obligations until it eradicates policies and practices traceable to its [explicitly segregated system].”).

The *Carrillo-Lopez* district court properly performed this analysis. As the government conceded, “discriminatory intent motivated the passage of the Act of 1929.” Congress never attempted to reconcile the racist origins of Section 1326, as the legislative circumstances show a continuity in legislative purpose stretching from 1929 through 1952. And as the *Carrillo-Lopez* court noted, the 1952 Congress “did not appear to be overly concerned with its animus toward Mexican and Latinx people, but instead welcomed racist epithets.”

This is not a case in which the mere passage of time or social transformation can be presumed to cleanse the taint of the law’s racist origins. The legislative history surrounding Section 1326 does not include lawmakers engaged in any effort to reconcile racist origins with equal protection principles. Instead, there was no severance between the original discriminatory intent in 1929 and the subsequent 1952 discriminatory intent when reenacting Section 1326.

The Ninth Circuit substituted its view of the evidence for the district court's.⁶

The Ninth Circuit did not discuss several items the district court found compelling in its analysis—the bulk of which the government never rebutted. Instead, the Ninth Circuit improperly engaged in a divide-and-conquer analysis, refusing to consider the history from 1929 and considering limited pieces of evidence individually instead of the collective totality that demonstrates racial animus was at least one motivation underlying Section 1326. *Cf. United States v. Arvizu*, 534 U.S. 266, 274–77 (2002); *United States v. Valdes-Vega*, 738 F.3d 1074, 1078 (9th Cir. 2013) (en banc).

There are several examples of the Ninth Circuit's improper approach. The Ninth Circuit mentioned the 1952 statute “was enacted 23 years after the 1929 Act, and was attributable to a legislature with a substantially different composition[.]” (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). But this overlooks that the 1952 Congress followed a Senate Report's recommendation that it pass a “reenactment” of the 1929 statute criminalizing reentry. S. Rep. 81-1515, 655 (1950). And neither the passage of time nor the change in the legislature are controlling here. *See Abbott*, 585 U.S. at 588–92 (approving plans adopted only two years after invalid plans); *Hunter*, 471 U.S. at 225–27 (holding state constitutional provision unconstitutional 84 years after its passage); *see also Raymond*, 981 F.3d at 304–05 (explaining district court improperly focused on “who [the legislators] were, instead

⁶ By assuming the role of factfinder, rather than deferring to the district court's factual findings, the Ninth Circuit's opinion creates conflict with this Court's clear-error precedent. *See, e.g., Monasky v. Taglieri*, 598 U.S. 58, 83–84 (2020); *United States v. U.S. Gypsum Co.*, 333 U.S. 364, 395 (1948).

of what they did”). Several of the same legislators from 1929 remained in office to debate and vote on the 1952 Act, and those same members “praised the 1952 Congress for protecting American homogeneity and keeping ‘undesirables’ away from American shores.”

Not only did the Ninth Circuit not historically examine the statute’s 1929 origins, but the 1952 reenactment, too, had a racist history that the Ninth Circuit minimized through its piecemeal review. The Ninth Circuit minimized the relevance of Congress’s repeated use of a racial slur and inclusion of the slur in a letter from then-Deputy Attorney General Peyton Ford. The Ninth Circuit claimed the key Senate report underlying the 1952 reenactment contained no “racist or derogatory language”—even though this report repeatedly referred to Mexicans and other Latin Americans using a racial slur and expressed Congress’s desire to maintain the country’s “white population.” *See* S. Rep. 81-1515 (1950) at 445–46, 473, 573, 579, 580, 584, 585, 586. The Ninth Circuit rejected evidence that Congress’s lack of debate on or acknowledgment of the provision’s past supported the district court’s finding of purposeful discrimination. And the Ninth Circuit rejected evidence of the stark disparate impact of Section 1326 on people from Latin America as “highly attenuated.” The Ninth Circuit’s decision thus insulates statutes from historical review and looks to whether each piece of evidence, on its own, is sufficient to establish discriminatory intent.

The Fifth Circuit’s decisions repeat these problems. In *Harness*, 47 F.4th at 303–07, the en banc court refused to consider the original enactment of Mississippi’s

felon-disenfranchisement law, reasoning that only the amended law was relevant under *Arlington Heights*. And in *Barcenas-Rumualdo*, 53 F.4th at 865–66, the court relied on *Harness* and “look[ed] to the most recent enactment of the challenged provision”—the reenactment of the illegal reentry provision in 1952. *See id.* at 866 (holding *Harness* “abrogates the relevance” of evidence about 1929 and “[n]arrowing *Barcenas-Rumualdo*’s evidence to that relating to § 1326”).

Each of these cases conflict with this Court’s precedent and change the presumption of legislative good faith into a per se rule, insulating laws from historical review whenever that law has been silently reenacted or amended. Only by comprehensively viewing the total efforts behind legislation can a court determine whether “insidious and pervasive evil” drove the law. *See South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, 383 U.S. 301, 309 (1966) (detailing how “Congress explored with great care the problem of racial discrimination in voting” when passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965). By considering only current legislation and ignoring prior discriminatory versions of statutes, the Fifth and Ninth Circuit’s application of *Arlington Heights* conflicts with cases from this Court, resulting in a new standard no challenger is likely to meet. Thus, granting a writ of certiorari is necessary to realign the Ninth Circuit’s caselaw with *Arlington Heights*.

III.

The question presented is of exceptional importance.

This case presents recurring issues of exceptional importance: (1) how to interpret *Arlington Heights* consistently with its core purpose of weeding out insidious purposeful discrimination; and (2) whether a legislature can “cure” past

discrimination by silent reenactment or amendment. *See, e.g., Harness*, 143 S. Ct. at (Jackson, J., dissenting from denial of cert.). And this case presents these issues in the context of one of the most highly prosecuted federal statutes. Immigration offenses constitute the second-largest category of federal prosecutions, with illegal reentry specifically accounting for nearly 20% of all federal criminal prosecutions in Fiscal Year 2022. And 99% of these prosecutions involved Latin American defendants.⁷ Section 1326 thus continues to be wielded as a discriminatory tool driving the mass incarceration of Latino people.

In addition, the Ninth Circuit’s reformulation of *Arlington Heights* will affect cases in various contexts outside criminal prosecutions for illegal reentry. The Ninth Circuit’s reasoning would have precluded the successful challenges to government action in *Hunter*, *Ramos*, and *Espinoza*, all of which looked to original discriminatory intent.

This question is therefore crucial for legislatures and courts grappling with problematic legislation. Without guidance from this Court, the Ninth Circuit’s opinion will allow legislatures to cleanse unconstitutional intent—both past and current—from a law by silent reenactment or amendment. The history of the law will not be examined, and courts need find only that individual pieces of evidence, alone, do not each prove racial animus. This holding not only conflicts with this

⁷ U.S. Sent. Comm’n, *2022 Annual Report and Sourcebook of Federal Sentencing Statistics*, p.45 Figure 2 and p.129 Table I-1 (2023), <https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/annual-reports-and-sourcebooks/2022/2022-Annual-Report-and-Sourcebook.pdf>; U.S. Sent. Comm’n, *Quick Facts: Illegal Reentry Offenses, Fiscal Year 2022* (June 2023), https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Illegal_Reentry_FY22.pdf.

Court's precedent, but also allows legislatures to leave racist laws in place, perpetuating a history of discrimination on new generations. Certiorari is necessary.

IV.

This case presents the ideal vehicle to realign the Circuits with *Arlington Heights*.

How much the past matters is determinative here. Guidance from this Court is necessary for courts to assess when discriminatory intent continues through subsequent iterations of a law infected with discriminatory intent. Here, the government is defending a law reenacted after conceding its unconstitutional racist origin. *See* Appx C. The legislative history surrounding Section 1326 does not include lawmakers who were engaged in any effort to reconcile racist origins with equal protection principles. Yet the Ninth Circuit gave no weight to the uncontested evidence of discrimination from 1929, despite *Arlington Heights* expressly allowing consideration of historical background. *See Arlington Heights*, 429 U.S. at 264–68.

Because legislatures and courts need guidance on how and when the past matters where the government concedes the unconstitutional origins of a law, this case presents an ideal vehicle for this Court to realign the Ninth Circuit's caselaw with *Arlington Heights*.

CONCLUSION

Because the Ninth Circuit's opinion conflicts with Circuit and this Court's precedent on issues of exceptional importance, this Court should grant a writ of certiorari.

Respectfully submitted,



Date: September 11, 2024

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