No. _____

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

CARLSEL ALEXANDER,
Petitioner,
v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Respondent.

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

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

(1) Is the lifetime ban on possession of firearms by persons previously convicted of a crime punishable by more than a year of imprisonment, codified at 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1), plainly unconstitutional because it is permanent and has no exceptions, nor process for regaining firearm rights?

(2) Are the Courts of Appeals uniformly in error, under both *Stinson* and *Kisor*, in holding that a firearm magazine with an industry-standard capacity is a "large capacity magazine" under the Sentencing Guidelines?

RELATED PROCEEDINGS

The following proceedings are directly related to this case:

- *United States v. Alexander*, No. 23-cr-90-1, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. Judgment entered November 30, 2023.
- *United States v. Alexander*, No. 23-30872, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Judgment entered November 7, 2024

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PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Petitioner Carlsel Alexander respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Alternatively, Mr. Alexander notes that numerous petitions raising similar Second Amendment issues have been filed in this Court, including a petition in the lead post-*Rahimi* case in the Fifth Circuit, *United States v. Diaz*, 116 F.4th 458 (5th Cir. 2024), which was filed last month. *See* No. 24-6625. Accordingly, Mr. Alexander requests that his petition be held pending *Diaz* and/or other petitions if this Court anticipates that it may grant a writ of certiorari on the issues raised herein.

JUDGMENT AT ISSUE

The opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit is attached as Pet. App. 1.

JURISDICTION

On November 7, 2024, the Fifth Circuit affirmed the district court's judgment and sentence. No petition for rehearing was filed. Mr. Alexander filed a timely Application for Extension of Time to File a Petition for Writ of Certiorari. Justice Alito granted that application, extending the time in which to file to March 7, 2025. Thus, this petition is timely filed pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 13. This Court has jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

CONSTITUTIONAL, STATUTORY, AND SENTENCING GUIDELINES PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides:

> A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

* * *

18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1) states:

> (g) It shall be unlawful for any person—
>
> > (1) 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.

* * *

United States Sentencing Guideline (U.S.S.G.) § 2K2.1 provides, in relevant part:

> **(a) Base Offense Level** (Apply the Greatest):
>
> . . .
>
> **(4)** 20, if-- **(B)** the . . . offense involved a . . . semiautomatic firearm that is capable of accepting a large capacity magazine; . . . and . . . defendant . . . was a prohibited person at the time the defendant committed the instant offense[.]

* * *

Application Note 2 in the Commentary to U.S.S.G. § 2K2.1 states:

> **2. Semiautomatic Firearm That Is Capable of Accepting a Large Capacity Magazine**.--For purposes of subsections (a)(1), (a)(3), and (a)(4), a "semiautomatic firearm that is capable of accepting a large capacity magazine" means a semiautomatic firearm that has the ability to fire many rounds without reloading because at the time of the offense (A) the firearm had attached to it a magazine or similar device that could accept more than 15 rounds of ammunition; or (B) a magazine or similar device that could accept more than 15 rounds of ammunition was in close proximity to the firearm.

INTRODUCTION

This case raises two important questions at the intersection of federal criminal law and firearms. First, whether 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1)—the federal felon-in-possession statute—is constitutional under the Second Amendment. Second, whether under the United States Sentencing Guidelines (U.S.S.G.) a person can have his sentence enhanced for possessing a so-called "large capacity magazine" when, in fact, he simply possessed a magazine with an industry-standard capacity. The answer to both questions is no. Moreover, both issues can only be resolved by this Court.

First, the Courts of Appeals are deeply divided not only on the constitutionality of § 922(g)(1), but also on the antecedent question of the appropriate legal framework for resolving that fundamental issue. Thus, only this Court can resolve the widespread analytical confusion and provide uniform guidance on the proper application of Second Amendment precedent.

Second, under both the *Stinson* and *Kiser* frameworks for interpreting the Guidelines (which is itself currently the subject of an entrenched circuit split), the Courts of Appeals have consistently erred by refusing to follow the plain text of the § 2K2.1 Guideline in favor of deferring to the Commentary, in defiance of this Court's precedents. The Guideline provides for an enhanced base offense level if a defendant possesses a "large capacity magazine." The plain and ordinary meaning of these words conveys a magazine with a capacity that is relatively greater than the norm, *i.e.*, greater than the standard magazine. Yet, the Commentary purports to define "large capacity magazine" as any magazine that holds "more than 15 rounds of

ammunition," even though many such magazines are average capacity and therefore not "large capacity" as commonly understood. Thus, reliance on the Commentary to apply the enhancement is contrary to the plain meaning of the Guideline text. Because courts are erring under both the *Stinson* and *Kisor* frameworks, their unanimous rejection of a textual-first approach to Guidelines' interpretation can only be corrected by this Court.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On May 5, 2023, Petitioner Carlsel Alexander was charged in a single-count indictment with possessing a firearm after being convicted of a felony offense, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1). He pleaded guilty without the benefit of a plea agreement. In the factual basis submitted in support of his plea, Mr. Alexander admitted to facts establishing that he knowingly possessed a firearm, knowing that he previously had been convicted of a felony offense. He also admitted that the firearm was "loaded with a magazine capable of accepting more than fifteen (15) rounds of ammunition."

Prior to sentencing, U.S. Probation prepared a Presentence Investigation Report (PSR). The PSR included a base offense level of 20 pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 2K2.1(a)(4)(B) because Mr. Alexander was a "prohibited person" due to his prior felony conviction and possessed a firearm "capable of accepting a large capacity magazine." Mr. Alexander objected to the § 2K2.1(a)(4)(B) enhanced base offense level because the facts contained in the PSR did not establish that he had a "large capacity magazine." Rather, the PSR rested solely on U.S.S.G. § 2K2.1 Commentary Note 2's purported definition of "large capacity magazine" to mean "a magazine . . . that could accept more than 15 rounds of ammunition." As Mr. Alexander explained, the Commentary was not entitled to deference under this Court's *Stinson* framework because it is inconsistent with, and a plainly erroneous reading of, the Guideline itself. *See Stinson v. United States*, 508 U.S 36, 38 (1993).

Specifically, Mr. Alexander argued that Commentary Note 2 flunked the *Stinson* test because the plain and ordinary meaning of the word "large" connotes relative size and "more than 15 rounds" is not a relatively great magazine capacity. "For example, several variants of the Glock pistol—dubbed 'America's gun' due to its popularity—come standard with a seventeen-round magazine." *Duncan v. Becerra*, 970 F.3d 1133, 1142 (9th Cir. 2020). "Another popular handgun used for self-defense is the Beretta Model 92, which entered the market in 1976 and comes standard with a sixteen-round magazine. Indeed, many popular handguns commonly used for self-defense are typically sold with [so-called 'large capacity magazines']." *Id.* & n.4 (listing other popular handgun models sold with 17-round standard magazines); *see also* Larosiere, M., "Losing Count: The Empty Case for 'High-Capacity' Magazine Restrictions," Legal Policy Bulletin, Cato Institute Center for Constitutional Studies, July 17, 2018 (No. 3) at 3, n. 12 (listing numerous best-selling handguns that come with standard magazines that hold more than 15 rounds).

Therefore, under *Stinson*, Mr. Alexander urged the district court to disregard Commentary Note 2 because it was inconsistent with, and a plainly erroneous reading of the text of the Guideline itself, and to not apply the § 2K2.1(a)(4)(B) enhancement absent sufficient evidence that he in fact had a "large capacity magazine" as that phrase is commonly understood. Further, Mr. Alexander argued that the same result would have obtained under this Court's *Kisor* framework (a claim currently foreclosed in the Fifth Circuit, which continues to apply *Stinson* to Guideline challenges, even as half of the Circuits apply *Kisor*). *See Kisor v. Wilkie*,

139 S. Ct. 2400 (2019); *United States v. Vargas*, 74 F.4th 673, 678-79 & n.2-3 (5th Cir. 2023) (en banc).[1] At sentencing, the district court overruled the objection and sentenced Mr. Alexander to 33 months, the bottom of the Guidelines range.

On appeal, Mr. Alexander pressed his *Stinson*/*Kisor* challenge to the sentencing enhancement, and he also argued that his § 922(g)(1) conviction must be reversed because the statute violates the Second Amendment according to the framework established in *N.Y. State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n, Inc. v. Bruen*, 597 U.S. 1 (2022). Mr. Alexander also conceded that his trial counsel had failed to raise the *Bruen* issue and that his claim was therefore subject to plain-error review.

In an unpublished opinion, the Fifth Circuit affirmed. *See United States v. Alexander*, No. 23-30872, 2024 WL 4708977 (5th Cir. Nov. 7, 2024). The Court affirmed Mr. Alexander's conviction by relying on *United States v. Diaz*, its post-*Rahimi* case upholding the constitutionality of § 922(g)(1). *Id.* (citing 116 F.4th at 471). And it affirmed his sentence by relying on its recent decision in *United States v. Martin*. *Id.* (citing 119 F.4th 410, 414-15 (5th Cir. 2024)).

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[1] The Circuits are deeply divided over whether *Kisor* or *Stinson* applies when interpreting Guidelines and Commentary. The Third, Sixth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuits apply *Kisor*. *See United States v. Nasir*, 17 F.4th 459 (3d Cir. 2021); *United States v. Riccardi*, 989 F.3d 476 (6th Cir. 2021); *United States v. Castillo*, 69 F.4th 648 (9th Cir. 2023); *United States v. Dupree*, 57 F.4th 1269 (11th Cir. 2023). The First, Second, Fifth, Seventh, and Tenth Circuits continue to apply *Stinson*. *See United States v. Lewis*, 963 F.3d 16 (1st Cir. 2020); *United States v. Tabb*, 949 F.3d 81 (2d Cir. 2020); *United States v. Vargas*, 74 F.4th 673 (5th Cir. 2023), *cert. denied*, 144 S. Ct. 828 (2024); *United States v. White*, 97 F.4th 532 (7th Cir. 2024); *United States v. Maloid*, 71 F.4th 795 (10th Cir. 2023), *cert. denied*, 144 S. Ct. 1035 (2024). The position of the Fourth Circuit is unclear, as different panels of that court have arguably conflicted and seemingly applied both approaches. *See United States v. Campbell*, 22 F.4th 438 (4th Cir. 2022) (applying *Kisor*); *United States v. Moses*, 23 F.4th 347 (4th Cir. 2022), *cert. denied*, 143 S. Ct. 640 (2023) (applying *Stinson*).

In *Diaz*, the Fifth Circuit held that the permanent disarmament imposed by § 922(g)(1) was constitutional because it fit within the Nation's tradition of "permanently punishing certain offenders." 119 F.4th at 468-69, 471. As historical analogues, the court relied on "historical laws authorizing capital punishment and estate forfeiture as consequences for felonies." *Id.* at 467. The court then reasoned that "if capital punishment was permissible . . . , then the lesser restriction of permanent disarmament that § 922(g)(1) imposes is also permissible." *Id.* at 469.

In *Martin*, the court concluded that Commentary Note 2 was authoritative under *Stinson*. 119 F.4th at 414-15. The court stated that "[t]he Guidelines do not define 'large capacity,' but the commentary does," and then rejected the defendant's *Stinson* argument by adopting the Ninth Circuit's reasoning "that '[s]omething can be both popular and large, and 'the popularity of that firearm does not mean that a magazine that can accept more than fifteen rounds is not also a "large capacity magazine."'" *Id.* at 414 (quoting *United States v. Trumbull*, 114 F.4th 1114, 1119 (9th Cir. 2024)); *see id.* ("In other words, if something can come in small, medium, large, and even extra-large sizes, nothing about those options indicates what is the usual size. Small and medium sizes may rarely be utilized, but that fact does not transform the large size into nonlarge."). Notably, the Ninth Circuit applies *Kisor,* not *Stinson*, to Guideline commentary challenges—yet *Trumbull* reached the same result as *Martin*. *See Trumbull*, 114 F.4th at 1117-18.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

This Court should grant a writ of certiorari in Mr. Alexander's case, or, alternatively, grant certiorari in another case raising the same issues and hold Mr. Alexander's petition pending a resolution of these important questions.

1. In *Bruen*, this Court established a new framework for determining whether a firearm regulation is constitutional under the Second Amendment. Under *Bruen*, for a law to survive a Second Amendment challenge, the government must "identify an American tradition" justifying the law's existence. 597 U.S. at 70. Thus, the government must prove that § 922(g)(1) is consistent with this Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation. But it plainly cannot do so here because there is no relevantly similar historical analogue to a lifetime ban on possession of firearms. As one Justice has noted, no historical tradition of prohibiting felons from possessing firearms for life exists. *Kanter v. Barr*, 919 F.3d 437, 458 (7th Cir. 2019) (Barrett, J., dissenting), *abrogated by Bruen*. Thus, § 922(g)(1) is unconstitutional on its face. And that is clearly and obviously dictated by simple application of *Bruen*. The Fifth Circuit was wrong to hold that *Bruen* does not compel this straightforward result. Mr. Alexander's conviction under § 922(g)(1) should be reversed.

2. In both *Stinson* and *Kisor*, this Court made clear that courts should not automatically defer to Guidelines' Commentary. Rather, courts must begin by giving plain meaning to the text of the Guideline itself. The Fifth Circuit, applying *Stinson*, failed to follow that textual approach. It gave no meaning at all to the Guideline and instead reflexively deferred to the Commentary. Other Circuits, under *Kisor,* have

made the same type of error. This Court's intervention is needed to both (a) correct the Circuits' uniform aversion to being their analysis by interpreting the Guideline text, and (b) to prevent the Sentencing Commission from legislating under the guise of interpreting as a result of courts' failure to hold the line between Guideline text and Commentary.

I. *Bruen*'s historical-tradition test makes clear that a blanket, lifetime ban on possession of firearms for all felons cannot withstand constitutional scrutiny.

A. The constitutionality of § 922(g)(1) is an important question, and the Courts of Appeals are hopelessly divided.

This petition raises a critical Second Amendment issue that has continued to percolate in the federal courts. Since this Court's decision in *Bruen*, the Courts of Appeals have been wrestling with challenges to the constitutionality of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1). Some courts have rejected all challenges, relying on dicta in *Bruen* and *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 626 (2008), that bans on possession of firearms by felons are "presumptively lawful." *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Dubois*, 94 F.4th 1284, 1292 (11th Cir. 2024); *Vincent v. Garland*, 80 F.4th 1197, 1201 (10th Cir. 2023), *cert. granted*, *judgment vacated*, 144 S. Ct. 2708 (2024). Some have rejected facial challenges but entertained as-applied challenges. *See, e.g.*, *Range v. Att'y. Gen.*, 69 F.4th 96, 106 (3d. Cir. 2023) (en banc), *cert. granted*, *judgment vacated*, 144 S. Ct. 2706 (2024); *United States v. Duarte*, 101 F.4th 657, *vacated and en banc granted*, 108 F.4th 786 (9th Cir. 2024); *Diaz*, 116 F.4th 458.

Last term's opinion in *United States v. Rahimi*, 144 S. Ct. 1889 (2024), did not alter the state of disarray. Courts continue to be divided on whether *Bruen* meaningfully altered the test to be applied to bans on possession of firearms by convicted felons. *Compare United States v. Williams*, 113 F.4th 637, 662-63 (6th Cir. 2024) (rejecting as applied challenge by "dangerous person" but indicating persons with other categories of non-dangerous felonies might be successful), *with Diaz*, 116 F.4th at 469-70 (finding felon dispossession consistent with the historical tradition)

and United States v. Jackson, 110 F.4th 1120, 1128-29 (8th Cir. 2024) (same, relying on Congress's judgment of what categories of persons are dangerous).

Further, this is an important question: 8,040 cases were prosecuted in FY2023 under 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) in federal courts nationwide, the vast majority of which are § 922(g)(1). U.S. Sentencing Comm'n, "Quick Facts – 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) Offenses" (June 2024). And thousands more are prosecuted under similar state statutes each year. Indeed, the Department of Justice agreed to certiorari in several cases last term, but none were granted argument. *See, e.g.*, *Duarte*, 108 F.4th at 787 (dissenting from grant of en banc rehearing). But the question will not go away, and a clear circuit split has continued. "[P]erhaps no single Second Amendment issue has divided the lower courts more than the constitutionality of the 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1) felon-disarmament's rule's application to certain nonviolent felons." *Id*. In sum, the circuits "require clearer instruction from the Supreme Court" regarding the constitutionality of § 922(g)(1) after *Bruen* and *Rahimi*. *Dubois*, 94 F.4th at 1293. Because these critical issues remain unresolved and the circuits remain split as a result, scores of cases soon will return to this Court.

B. Bruen represented a fundamental shift in Second Amendment analysis.

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution mandates that a "well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." U.S. Const. amend. II. In *Heller*, this Court held that the Second Amendment codifies an individual right to possess and carry weapons, explaining that the inherent right of self-defense is central to its protections. 554 U.S. at 628; *see also McDonald v. City of Chicago*, 561 U.S. 742, 767

(2010) (holding "that individual self-defense is the central component of the Second Amendment right").

Following *Heller* (but before *Bruen*), the Fifth Circuit and others "adopted a two-step inquiry for analyzing laws that might impact the Second Amendment." *Hollis v. Lynch*, 827 F.3d 436, 446 (5th Cir. 2016). First, courts asked "whether the challenged law impinge[d] upon a right protected by the Second Amendment—that is, whether the law regulate[d] conduct that falls within the scope of the Second Amendment's guarantee." *Nat'l Rifle Ass'n of Am., Inc. v. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives [NRA]*, 700 F.3d 185, 194 (5th Cir. 2012). To make that determination, courts "look[ed] to whether the law harmonize[d] with the historical traditions associated with the Second Amendment guarantee." *NRA*, 700 F.3d at 194. If the regulated conduct fell outside the scope of the Second Amendment's protection under that framework, then the law was deemed constitutional without further analysis. *United States v. McGinnis*, 956 F.3d 747, 754 (5th Cir. 2020).

However, if the regulated conduct fell within the protective scope of the Second Amendment, courts proceeded to step two: determining and applying "the appropriate level of means-end scrutiny—either strict or intermediate." *Id*. (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). "[T]he appropriate level of scrutiny 'depend[ed] on the nature of the conduct being regulated and the degree to which the challenged law burden[ed] the right." *NRA*, 700 F.3d at 195 (quoting *United States v. Chester,* 628 F.3d 673, 682 (5th Cir. 2010)). Under that framework, "a 'regulation that threaten[ed] a right at the core of the Second Amendment'—i.e., the right to possess

a firearm for self-defense in the home—'trigger[ed] strict scrutiny,' while 'a regulation that does not encroach on the core of the Second Amendment' [was] evaluated under intermediate scrutiny." *McGinnis*, 956 F.3d at 754 (quoting *NRA*, 700 F.3d at 194).

In *Bruen*, this Court expressly abrogated the two-step inquiry adopted by the Fifth Circuit and others and announced a new framework for analyzing Second Amendment claims. Under *Bruen*'s framework, "when the Second Amendment's plain text covers an individual's conduct, the Constitution presumptively protects that conduct." *Id*. at 17, 24. And, upon such a finding, "[t]he government must then justify its regulation by demonstrating that it is consistent with the Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation." *Id.* at 24. Only upon the government making such a showing may a court "conclude that the individual's conduct falls outside of the Second Amendment's 'unqualified command.'" *Id.* (citation omitted). In other words, for a firearm regulation to pass constitutional muster, "the government must affirmatively prove that its firearms regulation is part of the historical tradition that delimits the outer bounds of the right to keep and bear arms." *Id.* at 19.

C. Section 922(g)(1) violates the Second Amendment because firearm possession is protected by the Amendment's plain text, and the government cannot show a historical tradition of categorically and permanently disarming felons.

Straightforward application of *Bruen*'s test makes clear that § 922(g)(1) cannot survive constitutional scrutiny. The Fifth Circuit was wrong to hold otherwise.

1. <u>The text of the Second Amendment covers Mr. Alexander's conduct, and he is among "the people" the Amendment protects.</u>

The plain text of the Second Amendment protects the right to possess and carry weapons for self-defense. *See Heller*, 554 U.S. at 583-92. And *Bruen* clarified that this

right extends outside of the home. 597 U.S. at 9-11. Section 922(g)(1) is a permanent and complete ban on any firearm possession by felons in any context. Thus, the statute regulates (indeed, fully prohibits) conduct that is presumptively protected under the plain text of the Second Amendment. As a result, the statute is presumptively unconstitutional under *Bruen*. *Id.* at 24.

In an attempt to sidestep this straightforward conclusion, the government has adopted a novel argument that a person's status as a "felon" excludes that person from the Second Amendment's protections. But the plain text of the Second Amendment and this Court's precedent hold otherwise. In *Heller*, this Court rejected the theory that "the people" protected by the Second Amendment was limited to a specific subset—*i.e.*, those in a militia. 554 U.S. at 579-81, 592-600. The Court explained that when the Constitution refers to "'the people,' the term unambiguously refers to all members of the political community, not an unspecified subset," and there is thus a "strong presumption that the Second Amendment right is exercised individually and belongs to *all Americans*." *Id*. at 580-81 (emphasis added).

Comparison to other constitutional amendments confirms this view. As *Heller* explained, "the people" is a "term of art employed in select parts of the Constitution," including "the Fourth Amendment, . . . the First and Second Amendments, and . . . the Ninth and Tenth Amendments." *Id*. (quoting *United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez*, 494 U.S. 259, 265 (1990)). It is beyond challenge that felons are among "the people" who enjoy Fourth Amendment protection. U.S. Const. Amend. IV; *see United States v. Lara*, 815 F.3d 605 (9th Cir. 2016). And felons likewise enjoy "the right of the

people" to "petition the government for redress of grievances." U.S. Const. Amend. I; *see Entler v. Gregoire*, 872 F.3d 1031, 1039 (9th Cir. 2017). If a person with a felony conviction is one of "the people" protected by the First and Fourth Amendments, *Heller* teaches that he is one of "the people" protected by the Second Amendment, too.

This view was confirmed when this Court addressed a challenge to a different subsection of § 922(g) last term in *Rahimi*. The Court analyzed historical laws dealing with dangerous persons to find that § 922(g)(8) was consistent with historical tradition. 144 S. Ct. at 1899-1900. But the Court never suggested that Mr. Rahimi was not one of "the people" protected by the Second Amendment. Accordingly, Mr. Alexander is among "the people" to whom the Second Amendment applies.

2. There is no relevantly similar historical regulation that bans firearm possession for life.

Bruen provided temporal guidance on conducting historical analysis in the hunt for relevantly similar regulations. The Court can consider "whether 'historical precedent' from before, during, and even after the founding evinces a comparable tradition of regulation." *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 27. But *Bruen* taught that "not all history is created equal." *Id.* at 34. That is because "[c]onstitutional rights are enshrined with the scope they were understood to have when the people adopted them." *Id.* (quotations omitted). Because the Second Amendment was adopted in 1791, earlier historical evidence "may not illuminate the scope of the right if linguistic or legal conventions changed in the intervening years." *Id.* Similarly, post-ratification laws that "are inconsistent with the original meaning of the constitutional text obviously cannot overcome or alter that text." *Id.* at 36 (quotations and emphasis omitted).

Bruen—and, later, *Rahimi*—also offered analytical guidance for evaluating historical clues: "A court must ascertain whether the new law is 'relevantly similar' to laws that our tradition is understood to permit, 'apply[ing] faithfully the balance struck by the founding generation to modern circumstances.'" *Rahimi*, 144 S. Ct. at 1898 (quoting *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 29). In doing so, "[w]hy and how the regulation burdens the right are central to this inquiry." *Id.* Thus, "if laws at the founding regulated firearm use to address particular problems, that will be a strong indicator that contemporary laws imposing similar restrictions for similar reasons fall within a permissible category of regulations." *Id.* Importantly, though, "[e]ven when a law regulates arms-bearing for a permissible reason, . . . it may not be compatible with the right if it does so to an extent beyond what was done at the founding." *Id.* And this Court made clear that the burden falls squarely on the government to "affirmatively prove that its firearms regulation is part of the historical tradition that delimits the outer bounds of the right to keep and bear arms." *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 19. If the government cannot do so, the infringement on the right cannot survive.

The government cannot meet its burden to establish § 922(g)(1)'s historical pedigree for a simple reason: Neither the federal government nor a single state barred all people convicted of felonies from possessing firearms until the 20th century. *See, e.g.*, Adam Winkler, *Heller's Catch-22*, 56 U.C.L.A. L. Rev. 1551, 1563 (2009). The modern version of § 922(g)(1) was adopted 177 years after the Second Amendment. *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 66 n.28 ("[L]ate-19th-century evidence" and any "20th-century evidence . . . does not provide insight into the meaning of the Second Amendment

when it contradicts earlier evidence."). Section 922(g)(1) very much contradicts earlier evidence from the relevant historical periods: "(1) . . . early modern England; (2) the American Colonies and the early Republic; (3) antebellum America; [and] (4) Reconstruction." *Id.* at 34. Those periods lack evidence of any analogue to § 922(g)(1).

Historically, *some* jurisdictions *sometimes* regulated firearm use by those considered *presently* violent. But not *all* people with a felony conviction are presently violent. Moreover, the historical regulations required an individualized assessment of a person's threat to society. And finally, the historical regulations almost always allowed people deemed violent to still possess weapons for self-defense and provided the opportunity for people to regain their full rights. Thus, even those convicted of serious crimes—including rebellion—remained entitled to protect themselves in a dangerous world, with firearms if necessary. Those laws' targeted nature makes them a far cry from declaring that any person, convicted of any felony, can *never* possess "the most popular weapon chosen by Americans for self-defense in the home." *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 629.

Nor did England, before the founding, permanently ban felons from possessing a firearm. *See Kanter*, 919 F.3d at 457 (Barrett, J., dissenting); C. Kevin Marshall, *Why Can't Martha Stewart Have A Gun?*, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Policy 695, 717 (2009); Joseph G.S. Greenlee, *The Historical Justification for Prohibiting Dangerous Persons from Possessing Arms*, 20 Wyo. L. Rev. 249, 260 (2020). To the extent that England sought to disarm individuals, those regulations were usually temporary and made exceptions for self-defense—both features absent from § 922(g)(1). To the extent that

England tried to disarm whole classes of subjects, it did so on discriminatory grounds that would be unconstitutional today—and yet still permitted those targeted to keep arms for self-defense. For example, in the age of William and Mary (both Protestants), Catholics were presumed loyal to James II (a Catholic trying to retake the throne) and treasonous. Thus, Catholics could keep "Arms, Weapons, Gunpowder, [and] Ammunition," only if they declared allegiance to the crown and renounced key parts of their faith. *See Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 45 n.12 (quoting 1 Wm. & Mary c. 15, § 4, in 3 Eng. Stat. at Large 399 (1688)). A "relevantly similar" historical regulation that is not. *Id*. at 29. In short, the English never tried to disarm all felons.

Moreover, the early United States accepted that those who committed crimes—even serious ones—retained a right to defend themselves. That can be seen in the colonies' and states' statutes, early American practice, and rejected proposals from state constitutional conventions. *See Kanter*, 919 F.3d at 454 (Barrett, J., dissenting); *Folajtar v. Att'y Gen. of the United States,* 980 F.3d 897, 915 (3d Cir. 2020) (Bibas, J., dissenting); *Chester*, 628 F.3d at 679; *Binderup v. Att'y Gen. of the U.S.*, 836 F.3d 336, 368 (3d Cir. 2016) (en banc) (Hardiman, J., concurring). To the extent that the new nation sought to disarm people, the regulatory approach was much more limited. For example, the Virginia colony disarmed Catholics, still viewed as traitors to the crown. Robert H. Churchill, *Gun Regulation, the Police Power, and the Right to Keep Arms in Early America: The Legal Context of the Second Amendment*, 25 Law & Hist. Rev. 139, 157 (2007) (citation omitted). But there was an exception for weapons allowed by a justice of the peace "for the defense of his house and person." *Id.* And, following

the Declaration of Independence, Pennsylvania ordered that those who did not pledge allegiance to the Commonwealth and renounce British authority be disarmed. *Id.* at 159. Thus, either regulation required a specific finding that a specific person posed a risk to the state.

Colonial and Founding-era practice also suggests that committing a serious crime did not result in a permanent disarmament. For example, leaders of the Massachusetts Bay colony disarmed supporters of a banished seditionist. Greenlee, *supra*, at 263 (citations omitted). Nevertheless, "[s]ome supporters who confessed their sins were welcomed back into the community and able to retain their arms." *Id.* And in 1787, after the participants in Shay's Rebellion attacked courthouses, a federal arsenal, and the Massachusetts militia, they were only barred from bearing arms for three years, not for life. *Id.* at 268-67. In fact, Massachusetts law required the Commonwealth to hold *and then return* the rebels' arms after that period. Sec'y of the Commonwealth, *Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts 1786–87*, at 178 (1893).

American practice and laws during the Nineteenth Century—before and after the Civil War—also confirm that § 922(g)(1) does not comport with the "Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation." *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 34. The United States continued to regulate—but not ban—firearm possession by those feared to be violent. *See id.* at 55 (holding that 19th century surety laws allowed people likely to breach the peace to still keep guns for self-defense or if they posted a bond). But, as discussed above, that is not similar to § 922(g)(1). There is no evidence of a precursor to § 922(g)(1)'s broad, categorical ban.

In fact, there are at least two documented instances where attempts to disarm a class of offenders was rejected as inconsistent with the right to bear arms. First, as with Shay's Rebellion, Congress declined to disarm southerners who fought against the Union in the Civil War. Steven G. Bradbury, et al., *Whether the Second Amendment Secures an Individual Right*, 28 OP. O.L.C. 126, 226 (2004). The reason: some northern and Republican senators feared that doing so "would violate the Second Amendment." *Id.* Second, when a Texas law ordered that people convicted of unlawfully using a pistol be disarmed, it was struck down as unconstitutional under the Texas constitution. *Jennings v. State*, 5 Tex. Ct. App. 298, 298 (1878).

In sum, the 19th century history provides clear evidence that categorical and permanent disarmament for people convicted of an offense is unconstitutional. Not only was there a consistent practice of allowing people who broke the law to keep weapons for self-defense—at least one state appellate court and Congress agreed that disarming lawbreakers was unconstitutional. As *Bruen* teaches: "[I]f some jurisdictions actually attempted to enact analogous regulations during this timeframe, but those proposals were rejected on constitutional grounds, that rejection surely would provide some probative evidence of unconstitutionality." 597 U.S. at 27.

Rahimi did not affect this analysis—and, in fact, made all the clearer § 922(g)(1)'s lack of constitutional backing. The prohibition there passed constitutional muster because there were historical analogues *temporarily* disarming those proven to be *presently* violent. 144 S. Ct. 1898-99. The restraining order subsection of § 922(g)(8) passed constitutional muster because there is an

individualized finding of dangerousness, after notice and an opportunity to be heard, and the restriction lasts only as long as the restraining order does. *Id*. at 1895-96.

Again, "[w]hy and how the regulation burdens the right are central to the inquiry." *Id*. at 1898. Section 922(g)(1) contains a lifetime prohibition on possession of firearms by all convicted felons, without an individualized determination of ongoing dangerousness. It therefore violates the Second Amendment on its face, and Mr. Alexander's conviction under § 922(g)(1) must be vacated.

D. The Fifth Circuit's contrary position is wrong and conflicts with this Court's precedents.

The Fifth Circuit relied on capital punishment and estate forfeiture laws as historical analogous for upholding the constitutionality of § 922(g)(1). In doing so, it committed at least two significant errors under this Court's precedents.

First, *Bruen* and *Rahimi* make clear that the government must prove that § 922(g)(1) fits within this Nation's "historical tradition of *firearm* regulation." *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 24 (emphasis added); *Rahimi*, 144 S. Ct. at 1897 (same). In other words, the government's historical analogues must regulate *firearms*. *See Rahimi,* 144 S. Ct. at 1899 (relying on historical laws that "specifically addressed firearms violence"). Generalized laws authorizing capital punishment and estate forfeiture for various crimes, of course, are not firearm regulations, and therefore do not justify § 922(g)(1).

Second, this Court has made clear that the Second Amendment right "is not a second-class right, subject to an entirely different body of rules than the other Bill of Rights guarantees." *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 70 (cleaned up). Yet, the Fifth Circuit's approach to § 922(g)(1)—that historical capital punishment laws justify the

permanent deprivation of Second Amendment rights for living felons—conflicts with the treatment of other constitutional rights. "Felons, after all, don't lose other rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights even though an offender who committed the same act in 1790 would have faced capital punishment." *Williams*, 113 F.4th at 658. "No one suggests that such an individual has no right to a jury trial or be free from unreasonable searches and seizures." *Id.* And "we wouldn't say that the state can deprive felons of the right to free speech because felons lost that right via execution at the time of the founding." *Kanter*, 919 F.3d at 461–62 (Barrett, J., dissenting). "The obvious point that the dead enjoy no rights does not tell us what the founding-era generation would have understood about the rights of felons who lived, discharged their sentences, and returned to society." *Id.* at 462. Rather, "history confirms that the basis for the permanent and pervasive loss of all rights cannot be tied generally to one's status as a convicted felon or to the uniform severity of punishment that befell the class." *Id.* at 461.

E. Alternatively, this Court should hold Mr. Alexander's petition pending consideration of one of the many other petitions that will place the same Second Amendment issues before this Court.

Numerous petitions raising the same issues are now, or will shortly be, filed in this Court, including a petition in *United States v. Diaz*. *See* No. 24-6625. Accordingly, Mr. Alexander requests that his petition either be granted or held pending *Diaz* and/or other petitions if this Court anticipates that it may grant a writ of certiorari on the issues raised herein.

II. Under both *Stinson* and *Kisor*, the Courts of Appeals are failing to give plain meaning to the words "large capacity magazine" in the Guideline text and are instead automatically deferring to Commentary.

A. Applying the rules of statutory interpretation to the Guideline, a standard-capacity magazine is not a "large capacity magazine."

"[T]he Sentencing Guidelines must be interpreted as if they were a statute or a court rule." *United States v. Goldbaum*, 879 F.2d 811, 813 (10th Cir. 1989) (citing *Mistretta v. United States*, 488 U.S. 361, 389-393 (1989)); *see also, e.g.*, *United States v. Jenkins*, 275 F.3d 283, 287 (3d Cir. 2001) (We interpret United States Sentencing Guidelines the same way we interpret statutes[.]"); *United States v. Ward*, 972 F.3d 364, 369 (4th Cir. 2020) ("We interpret the Sentencing Guidelines using our ordinary tools of statutory construction."); *United States v. Carbajal*, 290 F.3d 277, 283 (5th Cir. 2002) ("It is well established that our interpretation of the Sentencing Guidelines is subject to the ordinary rules of statutory construction."); *United States v. Foster*, 902 F.3d 654, 657 (7th Cir. 2018) ("We approach an interpretation of the Sentencing Guidelines as we would a question of statutory interpretation—by starting with the text of the guidelines.").

And statutory interpretation starts with applying a plain-meaning approach to the text. *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Loney*, 219 F.3d 281, 284 (3d Cir. 2000) (explaining that courts "interpret undefined terms in the guidelines, as in statutes, using the terms' meaning in ordinary usage"); *Ward*, 972 F.3d at 369 ("As in all statutory construction cases, we start with the plain text of the Guidelines and assume that the ordinary meaning of the statutory language controls.") (cleaned up); *United States v. Mendez-Villa*, 346 F.3d 568, 570 (5th Cir. 2003) ("The text of the

guideline is the starting point in the analysis," and courts are to "use 'a plain-meaning approach' in [the] interpretation of the Sentencing Guidelines."); *Carbajal*, 290 F.3d at 283 ("If the language of the guideline is unambiguous, our inquiry begins and ends with an analysis of the plain meaning of that language."); *see also Smith v. United States*, 508 U.S. 223, 228 (1993) ("When a word is not defined by statute, we normally construe it in accord with its ordinary or natural meaning.")

Application of these basic rules leads to the straightforward conclusion that "large capacity magazine" does not encompass magazines with average, industry-standard capacities. The Guideline Commentary, however, purports to define the phrase "large capacity magazine" to mean "a magazine or similar device that could accept more than 15 rounds of ammunition." U.S.S.G. § 2K2.1, cmt. n.2. The problem is that magazines that hold "more than 15 rounds of ammunition" are standard in the firearm industry. In other words, such magazines are the norm. "Large," by contrast, is a word of relative size, *i.e.*, relatively greater than normal or standard size. Thus, as a matter of plain language and logic, it is erroneous to define "large capacity magazine" as a magazine that holds "more than 15 rounds of ammunition."

To determine a word's ordinary meaning, courts' common practice is to consult dictionary definitions. *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Perez*, 585 F.3d 880, 884 (5th Cir. 2009). The Oxford English Dictionary defines "large" as:

- "Great in size, amount or degree; big." Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "large, adj., sense II," https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1020644093;
- "Of extensive capacity, space, or volume; having or allowing plenty of room; capacious, spacious." *Id.* at sense II.3.a;

- "Of considerable size or extent; great, big." *Id.* at sense II.5; and
- "Designating a quantity, amount, measure, etc., of relatively great magnitude or extent." *Id.* at sense II.5.a.

These definitions make clear that "large" is a relative measure of size. *See, e.g. id.* at sense II.5.a ("relatively").[2] Thus, a "large capacity magazine" is a magazine of relatively greater capacity compared to other magazines. In other words, a magazine that has a capacity that is standard, regular, or average is not a "large capacity magazine."

A firearm magazine with a capacity of "more than 15 rounds of ammunition" is not automatically a magazine of "relatively great" capacity. "Notably, [so-called 'large capacity magazines'] are commonly used in many handguns, which the Supreme Court has recognized as the 'quintessential self-defense weapon.'" *Duncan*, 970 F.3d at 1142 (quoting *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 629). "Indeed, many popular handguns commonly used for self-defense are typically sold with ['large capacity magazines']." *Id.*; *see also* Larosiere, M., "Losing Count: The Empty Case for 'High-Capacity' Magazine Restrictions," Legal Policy Bulletin, Cato Institute Center for Constitutional Studies, July 17, 2018 (No. 3) at 3, n. 12. "For example, several variants of the Glock pistol—dubbed 'America's gun' due to its popularity—come standard with a seventeen-round magazine." *Duncan*, 970 F.3d at 1142.

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[2] *See also id.* at sense II.5.3.i ("greater than average"); *id.* at sense II.5.e.ii ("in respect of"); *id.* at sense II.5.e.iii ("in the comparative"); *id.* at sense II.5.f ("of a great (or greater than usual)"); *id.* at sense II.5.h ("relatively"); *id.* at sense II.5.j.i ("of a greater size than others of the same kind or group; that is the biggest comparatively"); *id.* at sense II.5.j.ii ("distinguished by their greater size from similar or related ones"); *id.* at sense II.5.j.iii ("of a size greater than those items designated small, medium, regular, etc."); *id.* at sense II.9 ("expressing relative size").

In short, taking a plain meaning approach to the Guideline (as required by the rules of statutory interpretation), a magazine with a 16-round capacity is not a "large capacity magazine." Thus, the Commentary irreconcilably conflicts with the text of the Guideline itself, meaning, under this Court's precedents, that a court legally errs if it treats the Commentary as binding and follows it in lieu of the Guideline.

B. The "large capacity magazine" Commentary runs afoul of both the Stinson *and* Kisor *frameworks.*

In *Stinson v. United States*, this Court held that "commentary in the Guidelines Manual that interprets or explains a guideline is authoritative unless it violates the Constitution or a federal statute, or is inconsistent with, or a plainly erroneous reading of, that guideline." 508 U.S. at 38. Only "[c]ommentary meeting those conditions is 'binding' and 'control[ling]' on courts." *Vargas*, 74 F.4th at 680 (citing *Stinson*, 508 U.S. at 42). Indeed, *Stinson* itself declared that "[i]t does not follow that commentary is binding in all instances." 508 U.S. at 43. Rather, the key is whether "the guideline which the commentary interprets will bear the construction." *Id.* at 46.

Stinson analogized Guidelines Commentary as "akin to an agency's interpretation of its own legislative rules," which typically "must be given 'controlling weight unless it is plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation.'" *Id.* at 45 (quoting *Bowles v. Seminole Rock & Sand Co.*, 325 U.S. 410, 414 (1945)). "The functional purpose of commentary (of the kind at issue here) is to assist in the interpretation and application of those rules," *i.e.*, the Guidelines, which "[t]he Sentencing Commission promulgates . . . by virtue of an express congressional

delegation of authority for rulemaking, and through the informal rulemaking procedures" of the Administrative Procedures Act. *Id.* at 44-45 (citations omitted).

Thus, under *Stinson*, commentary "is controlling when it functions to interpret a guideline or explain how it is to be applied." *United States v. Radziercz*, 7 F.3d 1193, 1195 (5th Cir. 1993) (citing *Stinson*, 508 U.S. at 42-44). But a court errs if it follows the commentary when the "commentary and the guideline it interprets are inconsistent in that following one will result in violating the dictates of the other." *Stinson,* 508 U.S. at 43. When faced with an inconsistency "the Sentencing Reform Act itself commands compliance with the guideline" itself. *Id.* Thus, if commentary does not interpret or explain a Guideline but is instead inconsistent with the Guideline or a plainly erroneous reading of it, a court must not hesitate to disregard the commentary and to faithfully follow the text of the Guideline itself, as *Stinson's* requirements "are not toothless commands." *United States v. Riccardi*, 989 F.3d 476, 493 (6th Cir. 2021) (Nalbandian, J., concurring).

As explained above, Commentary Note 2's definition of "large capacity magazine" encompasses standard or average-sized magazines and is therefore "inconsistent with, or a plainly erroneous reading of," the § 2K2.1 Guideline itself, which by the plain meaning of its text only applies to "large capacity magazine[s]." *Stinson*, 508 U.S. at 38. The Guideline cannot bear the Commentary's purported interpretation because defining "large capacity magazine" to mean a magazine with a capacity of "more than 15 rounds of ammunition" would render the word "large" in the Guideline itself meaningless. *See id.* at 46. When faced with such a conflict, the

Guideline controls. *See id.* at 43. Thus, the Commentary is not entitled to *Stinson* deference and should be disregarded.

Twenty-six years after *Stinson*, this Court decided *Kisor v. Wilkie*, 139 S. Ct. 2400. *Kisor* similarly held that an agency interpretation of its own rules is not entitled to deference unless the regulation itself is "genuinely ambiguous." *Id.* at 2415. Moreover, *Kisor* explained that before concluding that a rule is genuinely ambiguous a reviewing court must first exhaust *all* the traditional tools of statutory construction—text, structure, history, and purpose. *Id.* Only if a rule is genuinely ambiguous should a court then defer to an agency interpretation and, further, only if that interpretation is "reasonable." *Id.* at 2145-46. But not every "reasonable" interpretation is entitled to deference; rather, the "court must make an independent inquiry into whether the character and context of the agency interpretation entitles it to controlling weight" by considering whether the interpretation (1) is "the agency's 'authoritative' or 'official position,' rather than any more *ad hoc* statement"; (2) implicates the agency's "substantive expertise"; and (3) reflects a "fair and considered judgment." *Id.* at 2146-47.

Commentary Note 2 also fails the *Kisor* analysis because, applying *all* the tools of statutory construction, the word "large" in the § 2K2.1 Guideline is not "genuinely ambiguous." As explained above, the plain meaning of "large capacity magazine" excludes industry-standard capacity magazines. And this understanding is further confirmed by the Guideline's structure, which equates a "large capacity magazine" with a "firearm that is described in 26 U.S.C. § 5845(a)" for purposes of assigning a

higher base offense level. Section 5845(a) describes atypical, unusual, and/or exceptionally dangerous firearms like sawed-off shotguns, machineguns, and destructive devices (for example, grenades, *see* § 5845(f)(1)(B)). An industry-standard magazine is obviously not analogous to a machinegun or a grenade; thus, "large capacity magazine" is intended to apply only to magazines that are atypical, unusual, and/or unusually dangerous in the same manner as sawed-off shotguns and machineguns. Relatedly, applying the enhanced offense level to industry-standard magazines frustrates the Guideline's purpose, which is to punish offenders who possess unusual or exceptionally dangerous weapons via an enhanced base offense level. Applying the tools of statutory construction thus leaves no ambiguity in the Guideline itself, and therefore certainly provides no reason to defer to Commentary that contradicts the Guideline's plain text.[3]

C. Under both analytical frameworks, courts are disregarding the cardinal rule that interpreting the Guidelines must begin with analyzing the plain meaning of the text—not simply deferring to the Commentary.

The Circuits are deeply divided as to whether *Stinson* or *Kisor* governs challenges to the Guidelines and Commentary. *See supra,* at n.1. This case, however, implicates an overarching problem that is uniformly present in courts' current application of both frameworks—at least when it comes to firearm magazines. Under both *Stinson* and *Kisor*, courts are shirking their obligation to start by interpreting

[3] Alternatively, even if the term "large" were genuinely ambiguous, the commentary's definition of "large capacity magazine" is not a "reasonable" one because it sweeps too broadly by defining a wide-range of industry-standard magazines as "large." Furthermore, the commentary is not of a "character and context" that entitles it to deference, because the commentary's choice of a 15-capacity threshold is wholly arbitrary and without support or explanation.

the text of the § 2K2.1(a)(4)(B) Guideline and are instead reflexively deferring to the Commentary's purported definition of "large capacity magazine"—even though the Guideline itself is not "genuinely ambiguous" and the Commentary's definition is inconsistent with the plain meaning of the Guideline's text. The Circuits' analysis is in blatant violation of not only *Stinson* and *Kisor*, but the ordinary rules of statutory construction. This error can only be corrected by this Court given the uniformity of the error in the lower courts, under both analytical frameworks.

For example, the Fifth Circuit erred from the outset of its analysis by concluding that "[t]he Guidelines do not define 'large capacity,' but the commentary does[.]" *Martin*, 119 F.4th at 414. In doing so, the Fifth Circuit failed to start as it should have, by giving the text of the Guideline itself its plain meaning. "Just because a word in a guideline does not come with its own guideline definition does not leave us at sea about its meaning or give the Commission license to define the term however it likes in the commentary." *Riccardi*, 989 F.3d at 488. Rather, "[c]ourts presume that an undefined word comes with its ordinary meaning, not an unusual one." *Id.*

Once the Fifth Circuit erroneously concluded that the Guideline "d[oes] not define 'large capacity'" by failing to give the words their plain and ordinary meaning, its holding that Commentary Note 2 was binding under *Stinson* was all but a foregone conclusion. Indeed, under the Fifth Circuit's text-last approach—i.e., its unwillingness to give the Guideline text its plain meaning (or any meaning at all)—the Commentary could define "large capacity" to mean anything—even "more than one bullet"—without violating *Stinson*.

In reaching its holding, the Fifth Circuit's *Martin* decision relied on the reasoning of the Ninth Circuit in *United States v. Trumbull*, 114 F.4th 1114, 1119 (9th Cir. 2024). Unlike the Fifth Circuit, the Ninth Circuit applies *Kisor,* not *Stinson*, to Guideline commentary challenges—yet it reached the same erroneous result. Subsequently, the Third Circuit, which applies *Kisor*, also followed the Ninth Circuit's *Trumbull* decision and deferred to the Commentary. *See United States v. McIntosh*, 124 F.4th 199 (3d Cir. 2024).

The Ninth Circuit in *Trumbull* and the Third Circuit in *McIntosh*, though applying a different framework than the Fifth Circuit in *Martin*, made the same analytical error: Rather than exhaust the tools of statutory construction to interpret the words "large capacity magazine," the Ninth and Third Circuits prematurely determined that the word "large" was "genuinely ambiguous" and then deferred to the Commentary. *Trumbull*, 114 F.4th at 1118; *McIntosh*, 124 F.4th at 206-07. Just last year, in *Loper Bright*, this Court decried "throw up their hands" analysis in the analogous context of resolving purported statutory ambiguities. *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369, 400 (2024). That admonition applies with equal force here, given that the rules of statutory interpretation apply to Guidelines interpretation.

Further, the Circuits' approach inverts the appropriate balance of power between the Guidelines and the Commentary. "Commentary may only *interpret* the guideline." *Riccardi*, 989 F.3d at 483 (emphasis added). It cannot provide the substance in the first instance. If commentary does not interpret, "it is a substantive

legislative rule that belongs in the guideline itself to have force." *Id.* "In other words, the step before applying deference is asking, 'Is this really an "interpretation" at all?'" *Id.* at 492 (Nalbandian, J., concurring) (cleaned up).

At base, Commentary Note 2 is not an interpretation of the "large capacity magazine" Guideline at all. Rather, it is an addition to the Guideline that clearly expands its reach. Thus, "it is a substantive legislative rule that belongs in the guideline itself to have force." *Id.* at 483. By failing to prioritize the plain meaning of the text by exhausting all the tools of statutory interpretation, the Courts of Appeals are abdicating their judicial role to interpret the Guidelines and, in the process, allowing the Sentencing Commission to impermissible legislate under the guise of interpretation. Because this fundamental error is occurring in Circuits nationwide, under both the *Stinson* and *Kisor* frameworks, this Court's correction is necessary.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, this Court should grant Mr. Alexander's petition for writ of certiorari. Alternatively, Mr. Alexander requests that his petition be held pending resolution of other pending or anticipated petitions raising the same issues, including the petition in *Diaz*. *See* No. 24-6625.

Respectfully submitted,

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