SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE	SUPREME	COURT	OF	THE	UNITED	STATES
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SALVATORE DEL	LIGATTI,)	
	Petition	ner,)	
V) No. 2	23-825
UNITED STATES,)	
	Responde	ent.)	

Pages: 1 through 73

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: November 12, 2024

HERITAGE REPORTING CORPORATION

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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3	SALVATORE DELLIGATTI,)
4	Petitioner,)
5	v.) No. 23-825
6	UNITED STATES,)
7	Respondent.)
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9		
10	Washington, D.	C.
11	Tuesday, November	12, 2024
12		
13	The above-entitled matt	er came on for
14	oral argument before the Supre	eme Court of the
15	United States at 11:13 a.m.	
16		
17	APPEARANCES:	
18	ALLON KEDEM, ESQUIRE, Washingt	con, D.C.; on behalf of
19	the Petitioner.	
20	ERIC J. FEIGIN, Deputy Solicit	or General, Department
21	of Justice, Washington, D.	C.; on behalf of the
22	Respondent.	
23		
24		
25		

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(11:13 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument next in Case 23-825, Delligatti versus
5	United States.
6	Mr. Kedem.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ALLON KEDEM
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. KEDEM: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
10	it please the Court:
11	Using physical force against another
12	requires taking some step to bring force into
13	contact with the victim. That can happen
14	directly, as with a kick or a punch, or
15	indirectly, such as giving a gentle push to
16	someone teetering on the edge of a cliff. But
17	it does not involve an offense that can be
18	committed by pure omission, such as failing to
19	render aid to someone suffering from a natural
20	disorder.
21	The government's attempt to
22	reverse-engineer the use of force from the
23	presence of injury is contrary to logic and
24	plain meaning. It also runs counter to this
25	Court's instructions that "use" means active

- 1 employment, that physical force is violent
- 2 force, and that "against another" means making
- 3 contact with another.
- 4 The government's appeal to practical
- 5 consequences, in addition to being irrelevant to
- 6 interpreting the statute's text, is similarly
- 7 unpersuasive. At the time the Elements Clause
- 8 was adopted, all or nearly all of the statutes
- 9 identified by the government would have
- 10 satisfied the Residual Clause, and, per the
- 11 government's hedging here, many will satisfy the
- 12 Elements Clause too regardless of whether crimes
- of omission are excluded.
- 14 A failure to counteract harm may be
- morally and legally culpable and it may merit
- 16 severe punishment, but it does not categorically
- involve the use of violent physical force
- 18 against another.
- I would welcome the Court's questions.
- 20 JUSTICE THOMAS: So, in your thinking,
- 21 if you poison someone and cause -- thereby cause
- 22 the death of that person, the -- that is, in
- your argument, under your argument, treated
- 24 differently from withholding critical, say,
- 25 heart medicine when someone is in the process of

- 1 having a heart attack?
- 2 MR. KEDEM: That's correct, Your
- 3 Honor. So this Court has described poison as
- 4 having forceful physical properties that you
- 5 would have put into contact with the victim by
- 6 putting it in their drink. That's a very
- 7 different situation than someone who potentially
- 8 through natural causes slips into distress and
- 9 you don't take any action to put them into
- 10 contact with any force, and there may not be any
- 11 force involved if, for instance, it's a
- 12 congenital disorder.
- 13 So there's no force at all and you
- 14 wouldn't have used that force actively.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry, I don't
- 16 know -- you almost seem to be talking proximate
- 17 cause. There's no force in the poison itself in
- 18 what you did. The force is in the nature of the
- 19 substance that goes through the person's body.
- 20 Similarly, there's no violent force in a gentle
- 21 push of a 90-year-old down the stairs. You
- 22 could probably do it with a finger. So there's
- 23 no violent force there.
- What you seem to be saying is, if I
- 25 have a duty to act and I choose not to, I'm not

- 1 responsible for the force that I let work on
- 2 this human being? That's your position,
- 3 correct?
- 4 MR. KEDEM: No, Your Honor. So, in
- 5 both the poisoning example and giving a gentle
- 6 push to someone who falls down the stairs or off
- 7 of a cliff, you are not directly applying
- 8 violent physical force. It's a gentle touch or
- 9 you're just letting the molecules of the poison
- 10 fall from your hand. But there is still an
- 11 application of violent physical force when they
- 12 hit the ground at high speed.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, I -- I would
- 14 tell someone who's freezing in the snow that
- there's an application of winter conditions to
- 16 their body to kill them.
- 17 MR. KEDEM: Sure. And in that
- instance, again, you might describe the elements
- 19 as involved -- involving violent physical force,
- 20 which perhaps you could describe as using
- 21 indirectly if, for instance, you throw them out
- 22 into the snow.
- But that's a very different situation
- than a pure omission, where someone, let's say,
- 25 has an allergic reaction --

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's not a pure
2	omission. It's an obligation to act.
3	MR. KEDEM: Sure.
4	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I mean
5	MR. KEDEM: It's it's
6	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I could be in a
7	restaurant watching someone die, but I have no
8	obligation even if I know the Heimlich maneuver
9	to do it. However, if it's a child and my
LO	child, I have an obligation to try to save them
L1	MR. KEDEM: That's correct. And it is
L2	a serious offense
L3	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So I'm letting
L4	nature use its force to kill that child.
L5	MR. KEDEM: So it there's no
L6	dispute that it is criminally culpable behavior
L7	and can be punished severely. But the question
L8	is, is there violent force being applied to the
L9	victim and have you actively employed that
20	force? And in a situation where, for instance,
21	you just don't provide medicine or nutrition to
22	someone and they slowly expire, there is no
23	violent physical force of any sort. It's not
24	like hitting the ground at high speed.
2.5	And, moreover, you haven't taken any

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1 step to actively employ any force.
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- JUSTICE KAGAN: I guess I'm not sure I
- 3 get that. In the poison case, you're agreeing
- 4 that it's not my putting the poison into the
- 5 drink that's violent physical force; rather,
- 6 it's the way the poison acts on the body.
- 7 MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: And in the
- 9 withholding-of-medication situation, it's
- 10 similarly the way the disease acts against the
- 11 body, and -- and you're enabling that disease to
- 12 run.
- MR. KEDEM: Right. So I think this
- 14 Court has analogized poison to sort of like a
- 15 little explosive device that detonates when you
- 16 swallow it. I don't think the same is true, for
- 17 instance, to just the absence of chemical inputs
- 18 as necessary to keep your cells going. That's
- 19 not analogous to violent physical force.
- 20 And even in the poisoning example, you
- 21 are still taking some step to bring the person
- into contact with that poison, without which
- they wouldn't have the force applied to them at
- 24 all, even indirectly.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: So, if I take a

- 1 hostage and then just let the hostage starve,
- 2 which side of the line does that fall on for
- 3 you?
- 4 MR. KEDEM: So putting aside that that
- 5 would probably be a threat or, you know,
- 6 attempted use of force --
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: But physical force.
- 8 Just --
- 9 MR. KEDEM: Sure. So --
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- physical force.
- MR. KEDEM: -- so let's say there was
- someone sleeping in a room and you lock them in
- 13 the room and then they slowly expire. From our
- 14 perspective, that would not involve a
- 15 application of violent physical force, and you
- 16 could say you used the locks, but you haven't
- 17 actually used force against them.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, what do you do
- 20 with the fact that Stokeling especially seems to
- 21 measure force not from the front end, like force
- 22 applied, but from the back end on what does the
- force -- what -- what is its result? It seems
- to me that for murder, necessarily, the result
- was pretty extreme.

- 1 MR. KEDEM: So, respectfully, I -- I 2 don't think Stokeling takes that position. In 3 fact, the whole discussion in Stokeling was how much force do you need to apply, what's the 4 amount of force, to overcome resistance, which, 5 again, the Court wasn't focused on whether the 6 7 person was injured or not. It was can you do it just sort of by gently grabbing it, or does it 8 9 need to be more -- more vigorous. 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: But the measure of the force, if you're prying someone's fingers 11 12 off of a purse --13 MR. KEDEM: Right. 14 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- I mean, the 15 measure of force --16 MR. KEDEM: Yeah. 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- I wouldn't 18 describe that as severe or aggressive. 19 MR. KEDEM: So -- so that -- and that 20 was the back-and-forth. Everyone was focused on that same question. So they were still focused 21 2.2 on how much force was involved.
- 24 Castleman. So Castleman gives the example of a

You look also, for instance, at -- at

23

25 squeeze of an arm that causes a bruise, which

- 1 the Court said would count as common law force
- 2 for purposes of domestic violence but would not
- 3 count as violent force for generic purposes,
- 4 which shows that even the direct application of
- 5 enough force that sometimes causes an injury, a
- 6 bruise, is not enough because it's still not a
- 7 high enough degree of force.
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. Kedem, you know,
- 9 our intuition is that often omissions are just
- 10 as bad as acts and they are --
- 11 MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- sometimes hard to
- 13 distinguish. And, certainly, it can be murder
- when there's a preexisting duty of care that you
- 15 then omit to fulfill.
- MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right. But
- there are some places where we have gone well
- 19 beyond that common law rule and imposed a duty
- of care even for the good Samaritan.
- 21 So let's take a hypothetical. Someone
- 22 comes across the street, sees that the manhole
- cover's open, doesn't rescue the little old lady
- 24 who steps into it --
- MR. KEDEM: Mm-hmm.

1	JUSTICE GORSUCH: because this
2	person has animus toward little old ladies. Now
3	an extreme hypothetical. Justice Breyer might
4	be proud.
5	(Laughter.)
6	JUSTICE GORSUCH: That would be murder
7	in a in a state with a good Samaritan
8	statute. Physical force, I guess the gravity's
9	I mean, what what more powerful force in
10	the universe is there than that? Would that in
11	your view fall within the government's
12	understanding of what would qualify as as the
13	application of violent force?
14	MR. KEDEM: It would have to. The
15	government's view essentially is anytime you
16	have a bad result, you know that there must have
17	been violent physical force, which means that
18	not only would the death or other injury in your
19	example be violent physical force, it would also
20	be involved in literally every death since the
21	beginning of time because, in every death,
22	something bad happens because you either are
23	injured or run out of the cellular inputs
24	necessary to sustain life.
25	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And if I might just

- 1 ask a slightly different question. This is one
- 2 that -- yeah, I don't know of any more powerful
- 3 force in the universe than gravity, but any -- I
- 4 wonder whether this statute is divisible between
- 5 acts and omissions, and that isn't something
- 6 either side explored.
- 7 MR. KEDEM: Mm-hmm.
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I know it won't help
- 9 your client, okay, but perhaps -- I'd welcome
- 10 your thoughts on whether --
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- you think that
- 13 this statute is, in fact, divisible.
- 14 MR. KEDEM: So this statute is not.
- We have opinions from the court of appeals, New
- 16 York's highest court, saying that the statute
- can be committed either by affirmative acts or
- 18 by omissions, including pure omissions.
- So we have the Wong case, where there
- 20 were two caregivers, one of whom shook the
- 21 child, the other of whom failed to render aid.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yes. And -- and
- 23 they're duty-of-care cases, classic --
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- common law

- 1 duty-of-care cases, so you have to prove a duty
- 2 and then the failure to fulfill it.
- 3 MR. KEDEM: That's right.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Very different than
- 5 killing somebody or ordering a hit on somebody
- 6 by act. I mean, giving them a pistol in a brown
- 7 paper bag is a little different.
- 8 MR. KEDEM: It is. Presumably, if the
- 9 government thought that this statute was
- 10 divisible, they would have argued it, but I
- 11 think your question really highlights an
- important point, which is it just so happens
- 13 that this murder statute can be satisfied either
- 14 by acts or omissions.
- But the government's argument would
- 16 have to be the same even if New York had a
- murder-by-omission statute that could only be
- satisfied by a pure omission in which there was
- 19 no actus reus whatsoever, other than just having
- 20 a duty that you failed to satisfy. And the
- 21 government's argument would have to be, in every
- 22 single instance of that murder-by-omission
- 23 statute, violent physical force was involved.
- 24 JUSTICE JACKSON: And I take it your
- 25 argument is that when we look at the federal

- 1 statute and its definition of "crime of
- violence," that, really, what is at issue here
- 3 is a -- is the conduct of the defendant?
- 4 MR. KEDEM: That's correct.
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: That it's not
- 6 whether force is operating in the universe --
- 7 MR. KEDEM: That's correct.
- 8 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- to achieve a
- 9 certain result, but the plain text here seems to
- 10 suggest that we're looking for use, attempted
- 11 use, or threatened use of physical force and --
- 12 and that at least the common sense view of that
- is that it's the defendant acting to use,
- threaten to use, or attempting to use.
- 15 Is that -- is that the thrust of your
- 16 argument?
- 17 MR. KEDEM: It is, Your Honor. And I
- would emphasize there are lots of criminal
- 19 statutes, including in 924, in fact, even in
- 924(c), that focus on outcomes.
- 21 So subsection (c)(5)(B) applies a
- 22 heightened penalty if death results. The
- 23 Elements Clause, by contrast, is, as you've
- 24 described it, focused on the method, a
- 25 particular way of committing an offense that

- 1 Congress associated with armed career criminal
- 2 behavior.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, in the --
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: I take the point that
- 5 ordinary understandings of what it means to use
- 6 violent force might not cover omissions, but so
- 7 too it wouldn't cover poison. And we have said
- 8 that it does cover poison.
- 9 MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: So we're not really
- operating in a world in which it's completely
- 12 sort of ordinary Joe understandings of the
- 13 phrase.
- MR. KEDEM: So, respectfully, Your
- 15 Honor, I agree poison is sort of the outer
- limit, but I do think the Court was making a
- point there, which is that in response to the
- 18 defendant's argument in Castleman that
- 19 essentially you had to apply the force directly
- in order for it to count, the Court said no, if
- 21 you put poison in tea, it's very much like
- 22 pulling the trigger of a gun. It's a gentle
- 23 pull of the trigger. That's not the violent
- 24 force. The violent force is later, when the
- 25 bullet makes impact.

- 1 But still, in both of those instances,
- 2 you're still doing something to bring the victim
- 3 into contact with that force which may be wholly
- 4 absent in the case of a pure omission.
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: You're still using
- 6 something.
- 7 MR. KEDEM: You're still using
- 8 actively.
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: You're still using
- 10 actively. Let me ask you --
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: How about if, instead
- of putting poison in, I knew that there was
- 13 something in the refrigerator which had gone
- 14 very bad and it was completely toxic.
- MR. KEDEM: Mm-hmm.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: And I said to my worst
- 17 enemy: Why don't you eat that cake in the
- 18 refrigerator. Where does that fall on your --
- in your -- you know, which side of the line?
- 20 MR. KEDEM: Yeah. That sounds a lot
- 21 like the food in the fridge is poison and you're
- just tricking them into consuming it.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Correct. And so?
- MR. KEDEM: And so it would count as
- 25 use of violent physical force.

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: Even though now you 2 haven't done anything really. 3 MR. KEDEM: Well, respectfully, you have taken some step to bring them into contact 4 with it, without which, if you hadn't taken that 5 6 step, they wouldn't consume what was in the 7 fridge. JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I mean, in any 8 9 of these cases, including in the supposedly pure 10 omission cases, we can find some step. I mean, 11 when you're withholding medicine from the ailing 12 person, probably there's some step that you've 13 taken that prevents the ailing person from 14 getting that medicine herself or, you know, 15 there's some step that you've taken to put 16 yourself in a -- in a position of duty to that 17 person. 18 I mean, there's always something that 19 we can look to if -- if you're going so far as 20 to say that my telling the person to eat the cake in the refrigerator is an action. 21 2.2 MR. KEDEM: So I think you have to ask 23 yourself two questions. One, is there even
- 25 instance in which someone expires because they

violent physical force involved? In the

- don't have the right medication, usually, you
- 2 would not describe that as involving violent
- 3 physical force.
- 4 So, if a septuagenarian slips into a
- 5 coma and then doesn't eat and as a result dies,
- 6 no one is going to describe that death as
- 7 involving violent physical force. So the
- 8 question is, would you describe it as involving
- 9 violent physical force because there was someone
- 10 who was supposed to be there feeding the
- 11 nutrition tube -- tube but failed to do so?
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: And is that because
- 13 the context is violent physical force because
- we're in a statute that relates to firearms,
- 15 that Congress clearly was trying to get at a
- 16 certain category of person?
- 17 MR. KEDEM: That's correct.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: The person who is of
- 19 the type that they would engage in these kinds
- 20 of crimes that present, you know, risks of
- 21 violence in this way?
- MR. KEDEM: That -- that --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, I thought
- 24 that was the sort of context. So all of these
- 25 --

1 MR. KEDEM: That's right. 2 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- hypotheticals 3 about inaction, you know, even though there might be a step or not a step, you know, setting 4 5 that aside, the point is they're not even in the 6 realm of the kind of thing this statute was 7 about? 8 MR. KEDEM: That's right. We're 9 defining a felony crime of violence. 10 Congress had a very specific theory. 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, pick -- picking 12 up on that, do you -- would you argue that your client is not the kind of armed career criminal 13 14 that Congress was trying to get at when they 15 enacted this statute? 16 MR. KEDEM: We would not argue that, 17 Your Honor. We're focused here on the type of offense, and that's because the Elements Clause 18 19 requires an assessment of the elements of the offense and whether violent physical force is 20 21 present in all instances. 2.2 JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, counsel, picking --23 JUSTICE ALITO: But the question is 24

whether your client was convicted of a crime of

- violence, right?
- 2 MR. KEDEM: That's correct.
- JUSTICE ALITO: And some of the -- I
- 4 mean, these are fascinating legal arguments.
- 5 Some of the people who have come here to hear
- 6 this case may not know much about the facts of
- 7 the case. So what was the offense for which
- 8 your client was convicted?
- 9 MR. KEDEM: Hiring someone in order to
- 10 commit a murder.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: And that, in your
- 12 submission, is not a crime of violence?
- MR. KEDEM: It does not have as an
- 14 element the use of violent physical force.
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: And that's a
- 16 function of the categorical approach, right?
- 17 MR. KEDEM: That's correct.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: It's not -- you're
- 19 not talking about your client; you're talking
- about the statute.
- MR. KEDEM: That's -- that's correct,
- 22 Your Honor. Congress had a very specific theory
- 23 when it wrote the Elements Clause. It was not
- 24 aiming for all or even the most serious
- offenses. It was aiming for a certain type of

2.2

- 1 offense, actively using violent physical force
- 2 against another, the character of which changes
- 3 when you add a gun to the mix.
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: But, counsel, we
- 5 also said in Castleman and Stokeling that we
- 6 look at the nature of the crime and that
- 7 influences the scope of the interpretation. And
- 8 so, if interpreting the statute a certain way or
- 9 interpreting violent force a certain way would
- 10 have the effect of excluding and making the
- 11 statute virtually inapplicable to most of the
- 12 statutes in the states, robbery or domestic
- violence or, so here, I mean, murder?
- MR. KEDEM: Yeah. So -- so a few
- 15 points on that.
- 16 First of all, Stokeling was an
- instance where the Court was interpreting a
- 18 common law term of art, "force," that made an
- 19 appearance both in the federal statute and in
- the state statute, so it made a lot of sense to
- look at the states to see how they used that
- 22 term.
- But, beyond that, the Court is not
- 24 convince -- it doesn't engage in a sort of
- 25 nose-counting exercise. And even with respect

- 1 to states that have murder statutes, it's not as
- 2 if they're all going to be in or all going to be
- 3 out. So take New York's second degree murder as
- 4 an example. It's got five subdivisions. Two of
- 5 them are already out because of Borden because
- 6 they can be committed recklessly. There are two
- 7 others that can only be committed by an act, and
- 8 so they're going to stay in regardless at least
- 9 as we interpret them.
- 10 And that leaves just the one under
- 11 which Mr. Delligatti -- that served as the
- 12 predicate for Mr. Delligatti's arrest.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: So you think there
- 14 would still be in many states many murder
- 15 convictions that would still qualify?
- 16 MR. KEDEM: Yes.
- 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: It just seems -- I
- 18 mean, you can understand why stepping back,
- 19 which is, I think, Justice Alito's --
- MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 21 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- point to, you
- 22 know, those observing the argument in the
- 23 courtroom --
- MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 25 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- to say that

2.4

- 1 murder isn't a crime of violence and will rarely
- 2 trigger -- trigger the provision here seems a
- 3 little counterintuitive.
- 4 MR. KEDEM: It -- it -- I understand
- 5 that because, if you were to ask someone is
- 6 murder a crime of violence, they would say of
- 7 course. In the vast majority of instances, the
- 8 way you commit murder is going to be violence,
- 9 which makes it a perfect fit for the Residual
- 10 Clause, the idea that under the Residual Clause
- 11 --
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: But you think that
- Congress thought it was only covered by the
- 14 Residual Clause and that it wasn't an elements
- offense, murder?
- 16 MR. KEDEM: So I think that if
- 17 Congress wanted us to do this sort of as a
- 18 category assessment, it would have enumerated
- murder the way it did for some other offenses.
- 20 Instead, what it said is we want you to look at
- 21 whether their element of the offense involved
- 22 the use of violent physical force because,
- again, if you add a gun to that sort of
- offense -- so a robbery offense, for instance,
- 25 robbery is obviously dangerous enough, but when

1 you add a gun to the mix, the danger goes up 2 exponentially. It changes the character. 3 The same is not true for an omission Obviously, omission offenses can be 4 offense. horrible and can be punished severely, but you 5 6 don't change anything about it when you add a 7 qun, and so it's not the sort of armed career 8 criminal behavior that Congress was aimed at. 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: And didn't Congress 10 really home in on this? I mean, you -- you talk 11 about at least some of the legislative history 12 for the Criminal Code Reform Act in 1981, and I 13 was struck by a particular example in a report 14 that Congress -- the Senate report, where the 15 report talks about a dam operator who threatens 16 to refuse to open the floodgates during a flood 17 and thereby places residents' lives in jeopardy. And the report says, "Assuming the operator had 18 19 some legal duty to act, his threat would be to 20 engage in unlawful conduct dangerous to human 21 life, which is not a crime of violence since he 2.2 did not use or threaten to use physical force." 23 So it seems as though we had examples 24 in the record that Congress was aware of 25 omission and made pretty clear that when you

- don't act, you know, you're not threatening to
- 2 use physical force in the way that they
- 3 intended.
- 4 MR. KEDEM: That's correct. It's
- 5 remarkably specific. And I understand that not
- 6 all members of the Court are taken with
- 7 legislative history, but we can rely on it just
- 8 as a sort of contemporaneous use of the relevant
- 9 terms in context.
- 10 One of the most remarkable things
- about the government's brief is that they
- haven't identified a single instance, and they
- looked high and low, both in published opinions
- and also in news articles. Every single one of
- 15 their examples was someone who had used
- something actively, not passively, not the sort
- of passive benefit theory. They were described
- 18 as, for instance, NASA using the moon's
- 19 gravitational field by shooting a rocket up into
- 20 space and then aiming their satellite at the
- 21 right point to make contact with the moon's
- 22 gravitational field.
- This idea that you can use something
- just by passively benefiting from it, the
- 25 government wasn't able to identify a single

- 1 real-world instance of it, in contrast to the
- one that you -- you've just identified, Your
- 3 Honor.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: How about I
- 5 use the rain as an excuse to stay indoors?
- 6 MR. KEDEM: So I think, first of all,
- 7 you can use the rain in that sort of conceptual
- 8 sense. It's very different from using something
- 9 in a physical sense like physical force. And
- 10 even in that instance, you don't have the
- 11 "against another" or "against the person or
- 12 property of another" phrase, which also is a
- 13 sort of physical phrase.
- 14 Again, in the government's brief, they
- don't identify any instance other than one that
- they make up themselves that uses "use" and
- 17 "against another" in combination. And the
- 18 example they come up with is he used the
- 19 victim's disease against her. But, there, it's
- against her interests, not against her person.
- So, again, the government presumably
- 22 spent a lot of time trying to come up with this
- passive benefit sense of "use" in combination
- 24 with "against another." And if this is all that
- 25 they can come up with, I think we can conclude

- 1 it's not a normal way of speaking.
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: In most of our cases
- 3 where we've talked about what "use" is doing in
- 4 this phrase, we've talked about it as a
- 5 requirement of mens rea. In other words, to use
- 6 physical force means to have some understanding
- 7 in your head of what that physical force is
- 8 supposed to achieve.
- 9 MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: So we haven't
- 11 suggested that it really adds to the physical
- 12 force language with respect to the actus reus.
- MR. KEDEM: So I think that's correct,
- 14 but let me just sort of trace it through, and I
- think it actually comes out where we're asking
- 16 you to.
- 17 So the first appearance of
- interpreting "use" in 924(c) is in Bailey, where
- 19 the word "use" is in combination with a firearm
- in (c)(1), and the Court looks at dictionary
- 21 definitions and say they imply action and
- 22 implementation, and it adopts an active
- 23 employment sense of the word "use." And it
- 24 rejects the government's argument that you can
- use a firearm even if it's just stashed in the

- 1 closet because you derive some benefit from it.
- 2 So it's -- it's an actus reus interpretation of
- 3 the word "use."
- 4 Then that was ported over to an
- 5 Elements Clause in Leocal and then again in
- 6 Borden. And you're right that Leocal and Borden
- 7 were both about the mental state. But they
- 8 adopted wholesale the active employment sense of
- 9 use, and that active employment sense came from
- 10 what Bailey said was the ordinary meaning of the
- 11 term.
- 12 So, unless somehow they ported over
- just the mental state part of active employment,
- even though mental state wasn't at issue in
- 15 Bailey, then I think you bring the whole thing
- 16 along with it.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: If we -- if we adopt
- 18 the government's view of "use" as not being
- 19 personally employing some instrument but
- 20 allowing the laws of physics to take their
- 21 course --
- MR. KEDEM: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- what was the
- 24 point of us deciding that this statute is
- 25 different than the -- the -- the domestic

- 1 violence situation?
- 2 MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Aren't we just back
- 4 to that?
- 5 MR. KEDEM: Yes. So --
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Because anybody who
- 7 wishes to use the laws of nature to harm another
- 8 is -- is convictable and -- I mean, this is just
- 9 a statutory enhancement. Your client's going to
- 10 spend a lot of years in jail. This is just how
- 11 many much more, how many more, right?
- MR. KEDEM: That's correct, yes. So
- 13 -- and -- and I think there are some pretty --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And -- and we don't
- 15 really care about your client here, do we?
- MR. KEDEM: Well, I can't --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: We're trying to get
- 18 the law right.
- 19 MR. KEDEM: I -- I -- I wouldn't
- 20 presume to speak for you. Obviously --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
- MR. KEDEM: -- we do care about the
- extra 60 months that he would spend in prison.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: That's what we're
- 25 talking about. How many years is he already

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1
      spending?
 2
               MR. KEDEM: So, regardless of the --
 3
      separate and apart from the (c) -- (c)(4) --
 4
      (c)(3)(b) conviction, it's 240 months.
 5
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right.
 6
               MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
 7
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Back to my question.
               MR. KEDEM: Yes. So the domestic
 8
 9
      violence statute, very briefly, had a very
10
     different function, which was to close a
11
      loophole that made it lawful for certain
12
     misdemeanor offenders to possess a qun, and the
     Court was concerned that if it read the clause
13
14
     narrowly, it would render that provision
15
      inoperative in a number of states.
16
               Here, there's no dispute that,
17
      obviously, murder is going to stay very illegal
18
      everywhere, and our reading would not render the
19
      Elements Clause inoperative in any state.
20
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
21
      counsel.
2.2
                Justice Thomas?
23
                JUSTICE THOMAS: Are you really
24
      talking about your --
25
               MR. KEDEM: I apologize.
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1 JUSTICE THOMAS: Oh, that's okay. 2 (Laughter.) 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you. JUSTICE THOMAS: Are you really 4 talking about your client? We make this 5 distinction between action and omission. Are we 6 7 talking -- because we're in the world of theory 8 now, we're not really talking about what your client did, as Justice Alito alluded. 9 10 MR. KEDEM: That's right. We're here 11 as a consequence of invalidation of the Residual 12 Clause. 13 JUSTICE THOMAS: So would your case be 14 different if we did not use the categorical 15 approach? 16 MR. KEDEM: I suppose it would, but, 17 although this Court has considered abandoning 18 the categorical approach for the Residual Clause 19 and at least one justice has for the elements -for the enumerated offenses, I'm not aware that 20 any justice has considered it for the Elements 21 2.2 Clause because it requires as an element the use 23 of violent physical force. JUSTICE THOMAS: But, I mean, we're --24 25 we're -- I think it's fair to say, though, that

1	we are discussing something that bears no
2	factual relationship to your case.
3	MR. KEDEM: So I I accept that,
4	Your Honor, and would respectfully suggest you
5	essentially take the position you did in Borden,
6	which was to say whatever it is, criticism about
7	the categorical approach, but then to give the
8	Elements Clause its natural meaning.
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
10	Justice Sotomayor?
11	Justice Jackson?
12	I mean, Justice Barrett?
13	Thank you, counsel.
14	Mr. Feigin.
15	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ERIC J. FEIGIN
16	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
17	MR. FEIGIN: Thank you, Mr. Chief
18	Justice, and may it please the Court:
19	It's hard to believe that we're
20	actually here debating whether murder is a crime
21	of violence, as I think Petitioner just
22	acknowledged. This is one case where the law
23	already tracks common sense. Castleman tells us
24	that internal force, like a disease, can be
25	physical force. It also tells us that physical

- 1 injury must result from physical force. And the
- 2 Borden plurality recognizes that someone uses
- 3 force against the person of another when he
- 4 makes force his instrument to cause that person
- 5 harm through -- through force. I used "force"
- 6 twice there, but you -- I think you get the
- 7 point.
- 8 And there's really no basis in law or
- 9 logic to draw a distinction between the person
- 10 who gently sprinkles poison in the cup and the
- 11 person who, hating the victim, just withholds
- 12 the antidote.
- 13 By urging that distinction, Petitioner
- is asking this Court to discard literally two
- 15 millennia of common law that treat acts of
- 16 omission just like other acts.
- 17 He's asking this Court to cut out any
- 18 number of canonically violent murder, robbery,
- and assault offenses out of 924(c), the
- 20 definition of "violent felony" under the Armed
- 21 Career Criminal Act, and the definition of
- 22 "misdemeanor, crime of domestic violence" as
- 23 relevant to 922(g)(9).
- 24 And he would make all three of those
- 25 statutes -- he's asking this Court to make all

- 1 three of those statutes turn on distinctions so
- 2 arbitrary, unprecedented, and bizarre that it
- 3 would make application of those statutes --
- 4 again, Your Honor, I use this word with -- with
- 5 respect -- truly absurd.
- I would like to address a -- a couple
- of his points, but, if the Court has questions,
- 8 I realize my light just flashed.
- 9 JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Feigin, we
- 10 normally think, though, of -- think of force as
- 11 coming from the perpetrator, not from some
- 12 outside force, like gravity or some internal
- disease. So how do we get from where you are to
- 14 where he is?
- I -- I think his argument actually
- does make -- does have a common-sense value to
- 17 it.
- 18 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I
- 19 think, as Castleman demonstrates, we know that
- 20 whatever force causes death can be an internal
- 21 force. It can be the action of -- whatever
- action within the body is induced by poison.
- We also know from Castleman one of the
- 24 examples it uses is a disease. So the actual
- death-causing force can be a purely internal

- 1 force. If I know you have a weak heart and I
- 2 frighten you and you die, your body is attacking
- 3 itself. That's also true if you intentionally
- 4 and torturously starve a child. That's -- the
- 5 starvation causes the body to attack itself. It
- 6 starts eating itself away because it has no
- 7 other source of nourishment.
- If you're asking me about whether that
- 9 force has to be in some way -- I think the words
- 10 Petitioner uses in the brief are "unleashed or
- 11 channeled in some way by the defendant" -- I
- think that's somewhat of a gerrymandered
- 13 requirement.
- He's trying to do it to catch things
- 15 like, you know, your -- the wind -- your -- the
- wind catches your sail, or the example in our
- 17 brief where you're involuntary placed on a raft,
- 18 you see which way the current is going, and you
- 19 use the current to get you to shore without
- 20 doing anything.
- 21 But that channeling requirement is
- 22 equally satisfied in an omission case, where you
- 23 can stop -- force is going to occur. You can
- 24 stop it, you should stop it, and you don't stop
- it because not stopping it accomplishes your

- 1 purpose.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. Feigin, on that
- 3 score -- and if we're going to talk about common
- 4 sense, that's a good place to start sometimes --
- 5 your view, I think, would capture the good
- 6 Samaritan example as well and make that subject
- 7 to an additional enhancement under ACCA, right?
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: I don't think that's
- 9 necessarily true, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Why -- why -- why
- 11 not? Just to set the table again, we have
- somebody, a passerby on the street who doesn't
- 13 like little old ladies and intentionally allows
- someone to fall into and die, and the physical
- 15 force -- your -- your view is gravity's good
- 16 enough. I don't have to push her.
- 17 And now that would depart from the
- 18 common law, where there's normally a duty,
- 19 but -- a preexisting duty, but, here, we have a
- 20 good Samaritan statute. So that is an ACCA
- offense in the government's view? And why
- 22 wouldn't that defy common sense, if it does?
- MR. FEIGIN: Not necessarily, Your
- 24 Honor, and let me explain why. I'll take just
- one second to unpack this.

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1
                It -- it turns on what -- it -- it
 2
      turns on how you interpret "use of physical
 3
      force against the person or property of
 4
      another." And we think --
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah, but you -- you
 5
 6
     use -- you use rivers and currents. And what --
7
      what's wrong with gravity?
               MR. FEIGIN: So gravity is fine. It's
8
 9
      the problem of you're postulating that some
10
      state has some kind of aberrant duty --
11
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, no, it's not
12
     aberrant. Some states do. And many in Europe
13
     have a good -- good Samaritan laws that --
14
               MR. FEIGIN: So, Your Honor --
15
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- impose
16
      affirmative duties that didn't exist at common
17
      law.
18
               MR. FEIGIN: -- we -- we think that in
19
     order to use physical force against the person
20
      of another, there has to be, number one, a
21
     deliberate choice. That's the phrase --
2.2
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Sure, I got that.
23
               MR. FEIGIN: -- that -- that's what
24
      the Borden plurality tells us.
25
               And, two, the common definitions have
```

- 1 used, like, "avail oneself of," we do think have
- 2 an element of causation in there and that's
- 3 what's causing --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. No, I --
- 5 it -- it -- there's no doubt that my failure to
- 6 act caused this person's death. I've got
- 7 causation and I have intention. I have mens
- 8 rea.
- 9 Now I understand that when there's a
- 10 common law duty, our intuition is that that's
- 11 really bad. When a parent doesn't feed a child,
- when a doctor doesn't care for a patient,
- 13 that -- that's problematical.
- I'm testing how far -- and I don't see
- what line you would draw between that and a good
- 16 Samaritan statute, which, again, many states
- 17 have.
- 18 MR. FEIGIN: So causation includes
- 19 both cause and fact, which we have here, and
- 20 proximate cause. And I think the proximate
- 21 cause inquiry at --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Let's say I have
- 23 that box checked too.
- 24 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I think
- 25 where we part ways is I don't think I

- 1 necessarily think you have that box checked in
- 2 your example, and here's why.
- 3 Proximate -- the proximate cause
- 4 that's built into the statute here, I think, can
- 5 be informed by the common law duty as of 1984.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No. No, no, no.
- 7 No. Again, the -- I have a statute that's a
- 8 good Samaritan statute that imposes a higher
- 9 duty on ordinary people to be good Samaritans,
- and so it creates a proximate cause test that's
- 11 different from a common law test.
- MR. FEIGIN: So --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: You're just
- 14 resisting the hypothetical, and I can understand
- 15 why --
- MR. FEIGIN: -- your --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- because the
- 18 consequence of your interpretation has its own
- 19 common-sense problem.
- 20 MR. FEIGIN: With --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: It would capture all
- omissions cases, wherever the duty comes from.
- MR. FEIGIN: With respect, Your Honor,
- 24 if I could just explain. I -- I don't think I'm
- 25 resisting the hypothetical. I think I'm just

- 1 explaining that, as we normally do in
- 2 interpreting these kinds of statutes with the
- 3 categorical approach, there is some concept of
- 4 generic federal law.
- 5 And, here, what federal law might mean
- 6 by "use," its concept of proximate cause would
- 7 be informed by the common law scope of duties as
- 8 of 1984 if --
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Where does that come
- 10 from? I didn't see that anywhere in your brief.
- 11 That's -- that's new here at the lectern. Where
- 12 does that come from?
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I think
- that's just how we've been interpreting these
- 15 statutes. There's always -- it's always a
- 16 question of federal law.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: "Use" -- the term
- "use" depends upon common law duties in 1984?
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, we
- 20 think "use" --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Has any court ever
- 22 said that?
- MR. FEIGIN: -- incorporates the
- 24 proximate cause requirement.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah, yeah, but --

- 1 but --
- 2 MR. FEIGIN: It hasn't -- Your Honor,
- 3 it hasn't come up because, until the Third
- 4 Circuit --
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right. But it will
- 6 after this case.
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: Mr. Feigin, can I
- 8 ask you --
- 9 MR. FEIGIN: Yeah.
- 10 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- just piggybacking
- on what Justice Gorsuch is saying.
- I guess I'm just trying to understand
- 13 the government's position on what it means to
- 14 use physical force against the person of another
- in an omission case.
- 16 So let's -- let's take this
- 17 hypothetical. Say you have a lifeguard, and she
- 18 has a duty of care to rescue children in the
- 19 pool. A kid who she hates, hates, gets into the
- 20 pool entirely of their own volition.
- Is it your position that she uses
- 22 physical force against this kid if she doesn't
- jump into the water when she sees him drowning?
- MR. FEIGIN: Yes.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay. So how can

- 1 that possibly be? I mean, you're saying she
- 2 uses physical force, and that means no action
- 3 but an intention that this victim succumb to a
- 4 harm that she didn't put into place, that she
- 5 had really nothing to do with, but she sees it
- 6 happening?
- 7 MR. FEIGIN: So, Your Honor, she is
- 8 using physical force against the person of
- 9 another because, again, she could stop it, she
- is legally required to stop it, and she doesn't
- 11 stop it because she wants the victim to die.
- 12 And to use a dictionary definition --
- 13 JUSTICE JACKSON: So it's her -- it's
- only her mental state that is doing the work of
- 15 her using physical force?
- 16 MR. FEIGIN: No, Your Honor. It's the
- 17 combination of those things.
- 18 Under just a plain dictionary
- definition of "use," she has availed herself of
- the force, she has had enjoyment of the force,
- 21 she's made the force the -- her instrument to
- 22 accomplish her purpose. She's --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Let me
- ask you about the other parts of the statute,
- 25 the attempt and threaten. Same situation.

1 How does it work in an omission case 2 for this lifequard to threaten the -- the -- the -- the use of physical force against this kid? 3 Is it because she says something to him that 4 would make it a threat? 5 6 Like, I don't understand how omission 7 works with respect to the rest of the statute. MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I -- if 8 9 I could depart from the lifeguard example, where it might be -- I mean, I could --10 11 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, no, I want the 12 lifeguard example. 13 MR. FEIGIN: You want an example of 14 the life --15 JUSTICE JACKSON: I -- I -- I want to 16 ask you -- I want to ask you: In the lifequard 17 example, if she says, hey, kid, if you get into the water but can't swim or start to drown, I'm 18 19 not coming to get you, is that a threat of use 20 of physical force in your view? Or how else 21 would you accomplish the threat part of this? 2.2 MR. FEIGIN: Well, two points, Your 23 Honor. Number one, I think, if that were 24

generally considered a threat for purposes of

- 1 the substantive statute that the person also has
- 2 to violate under state or federal law, then
- 3 perhaps that would be the threatened use of
- 4 force.
- 5 But it's easy to see threatened use of
- 6 force in omission cases in other examples.
- 7 Suppose you're the caretaker for an
- 8 old, sickly man, and you tell him: Look, I'm
- 9 not going to give you your medicine today, and
- 10 you're going to die unless you give me a -- the
- 11 combination to that safe over there, where you
- 12 keep all your gold bars. That is threatening an
- omission. I think everyone would consider that
- 14 threatening an omission. And it's --
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: But is it a violent
- 16 --
- 17 MR. FEIGIN: -- I think it would also
- 18 constitute --
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- is it a crime of
- 20 violence? I mean, this was the point that
- 21 Justice Gorsuch, I thought, was making before,
- 22 that you may have culpable conduct under the
- law, but what we're looking for for the purpose
- of this enhancement is violent conduct, violent
- 25 criminal conduct.

1	And I guess what I'm worried about is
2	the government's interpretation that has, you
3	know, lifeguards and caregivers and people who
4	very intentionally and perhaps even criminally
5	withhold their duties actually being put in the
6	bucket of violence even though they don't act.
7	MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, if you
8	look at page 550 of the Court's decision in
9	Stokeling, you'll see one dictionary definition
10	of "violence" that defines it in terms of the
11	causation of physical harm. And in these
12	cases I mean, let's not lose sight of it
13	someone is using harm I mean, I realize
14	JUSTICE JACKSON: But they're not
15	using, Mr. Feigin. I mean, that's my my
16	problem is I don't understand how you get use to
17	inaction, how you get use out of inaction.
18	MR. FEIGIN: So, Your Honor, maybe a
19	few examples. He accuses us of having no
20	examples. I think, if you look at our brief,
21	you'll see a number of them. But let me give
22	you an example that comes basically straight
23	from one of this Court's own opinions, which is
24	let's take a look at the Borden plurality again.
25	The Borden plurality has an example of

- 1 use of physical force against the person of
- 2 another when someone is driving a car, sees
- 3 someone come in front of them, and keeps, in the
- 4 Court's words, plowing or -- sorry -- the
- 5 plurality's words, plowing ahead and hits them.
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: Action. Action.
- 7 They're moving, right?
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I --
- 9 this is all just a game of -- I -- I think
- 10 this is what one might describe as just sort of
- 11 a terminological word game. I could also --
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, when you ask
- 13 -- answer these questions, Mr. Feigin, are you
- thinking about the use of physical force as an
- ordinary meaning kind of question, or are you
- 16 saying it has a specialized legal meaning?
- 17 MR. FEIGIN: I think it's an ordinary
- meaning that's informed by the common law. So,
- 19 Your Honor, to the ordinary meaning point, on
- 20 the Borden plurality example, I could easily
- 21 describe that conduct as simply omitting to hit
- 22 the brakes or omitting to turn the steering
- wheel.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: And then we'd say
- you're playing word games, I mean, because I

- 1 think, when you push your foot on the
- 2 accelerator and drive your car into somebody,
- 3 that's not really such a hard case.
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: And --
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: But some of these are
- 6 hard cases, like the lifeguard example, where we
- 7 would say, you know, the lifeguard is just
- 8 sitting there, and this is not like what a
- 9 normal person would think of as a use of
- 10 physical force.
- 11 So it's almost as though we have to
- 12 pick our absurdity. You started with one
- 13 absurdity. We would say that murder is not a
- 14 crime of violence. That seems pretty absurd.
- 15 But here's another absurdity. The lifeguard is
- just sitting up there watching somebody, is
- 17 using physical force. That seems pretty weird
- 18 too.
- 19 MR. FEIGIN: So, Your Honor, I think
- 20 your two questions, as Your Honor probably
- 21 recognizes, really pair together here. And the
- 22 reason that we have two millennia of law that
- 23 don't draw this distinction is precisely because
- it is a word game.
- 25 If you look at, for example, the Hall

- 1 -- the Hall treatise that we cite, that's from
- 2 1960 but still substantially predates the ACCA,
- 3 or you even want to go further back and you look
- 4 at the 1875 Wharton treatise, you'll see that
- 5 the Wharton treatise, for example, in Section 72
- 6 says even sleeping can be an affirmative act and
- 7 it can lead to liability when there's something
- 8 you're supposed to be doing but you're not doing
- 9 it.
- 10 And the common law sources that we
- 11 cite, both Hall and Territory against Manton,
- 12 which is an 1888 case, have no trouble
- describing those kinds of omission cases as
- involving the use of force.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel,
- 16 getting -- I'd like to get back to the lifeguard
- 17 also. You say the force she was -- she was
- 18 using the force of gravity. And was she using
- it before the child jumped in the pool?
- 20 MR. FEIGIN: I -- no, Your Honor. And
- 21 part of --
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So she did
- 23 something that suddenly gravity was there?
- 24 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, what
- 25 happened -- first of all, I don't think the

- 1 force here is the gravity. I think the force is
- 2 whatever --
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I thought --
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: -- whatever happens
- 5 within the body to -- I mean, you -- you can
- 6 conceive of it in a number of ways. It could be
- 7 the force of the water. It could be the
- 8 gravity. It could be, as --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What is the
- 10 force of the water?
- 11 MR. FEIGIN: I mean, I don't know if
- 12 she -- I guess the pool is probably not deep
- enough for her to get crushed in it, but it's --
- 14 the gravity is dragging her down in the pool.
- There's an internal process going on in her body
- 16 whereby her life is sucked away from her. I
- 17 apologize I'm not a doctor. I couldn't quite
- 18 tell you what happens with asphyxiation. But
- 19 the body's going to be attacking itself there,
- 20 gasping for air --
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I mean --
- MR. FEIGIN: -- eventually to die.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- it's the
- same thing Justice Kagan said. The lifeguard's
- 25 not doing anything.

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1
                MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, to your
 2
      specific point, I could easily reframe it as the
 3
      lifeguard withholding to -- from the lifeguard's
 4
     duty to rescue the child. And, you know, if you
      think of the -- I mean, again, I -- I -- I think
 5
     this is easier to see, and I'll translate the
 6
7
      lifeguard example in a second, but easier to see
      in the -- in the Borden car-plowing-ahead
 8
      example. I mean, if I just --
 9
10
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS:
                                        The car -- car
11
     plowing ahead is different than the lifequard
12
     doing nothing?
                MR. FEIGIN: Well, I don't think --
13
14
     well, okay, Your Honor, I think the lifeguard is
15
     using the force there because the lifeguard is
16
     using some physical force that causes the
     victim's death, and the lifeguard wants the
17
18
      victim to die. The lifeguard is availing --
19
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The lifequard
      wants -- but all that, that's beside the point.
20
      Your submission is that somebody who's just
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2.2
      sitting there is using force, the force of
23
     gravity --
24
               MR. FEIGIN: Yes.
                                   I mean, under a
25
     plain --
```

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1
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- and the
 2
      force of the water.
 3
               MR. FEIGIN: -- under a plain
 4
     definition, he's taking advantage of the force,
     he is availing himself of the force, he's
 5
 6
     enjoying the force --
7
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: All right.
               MR. FEIGIN: -- he's making the force
 8
     his instrument. Oh, I don't have --
 9
10
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But he's not
11
     doing anything.
12
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. -- Mr. --
13
               JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, don't --
14
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- Mr. Feigin, if I
15
     might just follow up on this. Is there any
16
     death that's intended and caused by somebody
17
     doing nothing, like our lifeguard, that wouldn't
18
      involve the use of violent physical force
19
     because every death is going to be affected by
20
     gravity or water or -- and the body will fight
      itself in your terms? I mean, that's how death
21
22
     occurs, I guess, in the government's view.
23
               MR. FEIGIN: So, Your Honor, to answer
24
     your --
25
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: What -- what death
```

- wouldn't qualify?
- 2 MR. FEIGIN: So, to answer your
- 3 specific question, I don't think every death
- 4 fits the -- involves the -- someone using
- 5 physical force against the person of another.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, if the
- 7 lifeguard can do it.
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: But I do think that every
- 9 death does involve physical force. The physical
- 10 force requirement --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Every death involves
- 12 physical force. And why wouldn't it all be
- violent? Because it's all extremely unpleasant.
- MR. FEIGIN: We do think every death
- involves physical force and violent physical
- 16 force --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay.
- 18 MR. FEIGIN: -- within the meaning of
- 19 Curtis Johnson.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. All right.
- 21 Got it. Got it.
- MR. FEIGIN: The -- not all of them
- are going to satisfy this statute because not
- 24 all of them are going --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: They're all violent

1 physical force, though? 2 MR. FEIGIN: Yes, Your Honor --3 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. All right. MR. FEIGN: -- because -- because 4 5 there is --6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right. I've got 7 another question for you. MR. FEIGIN: -- the --8 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I got it. I got it. 10 MR. FEIGIN: Sorry. Can I add --11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Sure. 12 MR. FEIGIN: Sorry. I just wanted to 13 add the point that the physical force 14 requirement of the statute is not to carve out 15 things like murder and physical harm. It's to 16 carve out, like, property crimes, fraud --17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. 18 MR. FEIGIN: -- that sort of thing. 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But all murders are, 20 by definition, the use of violent physical 21 force, I think. I think it has to be. 2.2 MR. FEIGIN: Subject to the proximate 23 cause caveat I was discussing with you earlier 24 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah.

- 1 Yeah. With the lifeguard, yeah.
- 2 MR. FEIGIN: -- Justice Gorsuch, yes.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. Okay.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And the mens rea.
- 5 MR. FEIGIN: And it's going to be --
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And the mens rea.
- 7 MR. FEIGIN: And the mens rea --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah, yeah.
- 9 MR. FEIGIN: -- of course, that --
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
- 11 MR. FEIGIN: -- that I also mentioned
- 12 at that time.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But -- all right.
- 14 It -- kind of a little strange to think that
- 15 Congress meant by this, if we want to talk about
- 16 common sense, that every -- every death is
- 17 encompassed so long as I can meet mens rea and
- 18 causation.
- 19 But put that aside. I really think
- you're struggling, if I'm honest with you, to
- 21 try and defend a position that just has nothing
- 22 to do with this case, right? We've got a
- 23 defendant over here who ordered a hit job. I
- 24 mean, that's what everyone's -- the common sense
- 25 on your side.

1	MR. FEIGIN: And handed them the gun.
2	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And handed them a
3	gun in a paper bag and the whole nine yards.
4	It's like out of a movie. And here we are
5	talking about lifeguards and omissions, and it
6	makes me wonder whether, again, as I asked your
7	friend on the other side, anybody considered
8	whether this statute might be divisible because
9	traditionally, traditionally, murder statutes
10	encompass two very distinct things, acts
11	ordering the hit job and omissions where there
12	is a preexisting duty of care. Very different.
13	Does that does that resonate to you
14	at all? It might help you.
15	MR. FEIGIN: Yeah, Your Honor, I think
16	we might make divisibility arguments with
17	respect to some statutes, perhaps including this
18	one, if the Court were to rule against us.
19	Obviously, we won in the Second Circuit and we
20	didn't make a divisibility argument because we
21	were already
22	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, if that's the
23	case, maybe we go back to Justice Kavanaugh's
24	question from the last case. Why wouldn't we
25	remand this to ask that we resolve that first

- 1 before we start talking about lifeguards and
- 2 every murder being encompassed within this?
- 3 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Every death.
- 5 MR. FEIGIN: -- I think this is going
- 6 to come up in any number of cases whether or not
- 7 the Court resolves it here because, as we point
- 8 out in our brief, 35 states by statute include
- 9 omission liability, and one common way to do
- 10 that is just to define the word "act" to include
- omissions. That's the way New York does it.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, omissions plus
- 13 duty of care is what they do.
- MR. FEIGIN: Yes.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And so, again, if
- 16 you -- if you won here, you'd have a great
- 17 precedent maybe that some of the others would be
- 18 divisible too. I would have thought that would
- 19 have been useful to you.
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, we did
- 21 not make that argument --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I know that.
- 23 MR. FEIGIN: -- below. It's a state
- law argument that we don't think is
- appropriately made in this Court. And we do

1	want to be
2	JUSTICE GORSUCH: I agree with that.
3	JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, what would a
4	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is
5	JUSTICE KAGAN: divisibility
6	argument as to this statute look like, if I can
7	ask?
8	MR. FEIGIN: I think we would probably
9	be relying on cases, and New York has some,
LO	where, because omission liability, as Justice
L1	Gorsuch just pointed out, requires a duty as
L2	well, there are cases where the jury
L3	instructions, for example, were found deficient
L4	because they didn't specifically allege the
L5	duty.
L6	But there are cases, and we yeah,
L7	there are a couple of examples of them in the
L8	briefs, where something like horrific child
L9	neglect, the and also beating a child are
20	kind of charged together. So I think the the
21	outcome of that would be a little bit in doubt.
22	And that's actually the only reason
23	why we've said that all the statutes listed in
24	our appendix are just at risk. It's the same
2.5	thing the Court said in Voisine. They're at

1 risk because we're not quite sure how the 2 divisibility analysis is going to shake out. 3 But there's no question that we've already lost in the Third Circuit. There's no 4 question that that's going to affect charges 5 under the hate crimes statute in that circuit. 6 7 It's going -- and we think, if the Court were to rule against us, it would affect 8 charges in the hate crime statute in other 9 10 The Buffalo supermarket shooter has 11 raised this very argument and preserved it. 12 if we lose it here, then the hate crimes statute is not a crime of violence, killing somebody 13 14 because you are biased against their race, 15 because it could possibly be committed by the 16 conduct of being a daycare worker and realizing 17 that there's a bomb in the building and deciding 18 you're only going to save the children of one 19 race. 20 JUSTICE JACKSON: So is this just --21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Are you 2.2 fighting the categorical approach? 23 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I mean, isn't

that the root of your problem? And I guess, I

- 1 mean, the divisibility argument has a lot going
- 2 for it, but is it -- how does it fit with the
- 3 categorical approach?
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: Your Honor, not every
- 5 statute is going to be -- be divisible by act
- 6 versus omission. It's very common to define
- 7 "act" as, you know, by -- to define it by
- 8 omission. That's the model penal code
- 9 definition in Section 1.137.
- But, as to fighting the categorical
- 11 approach, we had that fight a few years ago and
- 12 we lost, so I am no longer --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is --
- MR. FEIGIN: -- fighting the
- 15 categorical approach to the statute.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I'm just
- wondering if you're trying to get it in the
- 18 backdoor.
- 19 MR. FEIGIN: No, Your Honor. The
- 20 point I'm making is I -- I think there's -- I
- 21 think that approaching this with some sort of
- 22 degree of common sense that is here informed by
- two millennia of common law, and Voisine looked
- 24 at the common law to a certain extent in
- interpreting what the term "use" meant.

- 1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The other side
- 2 says that the common sense is really captured by
- 3 the Residual Clause.
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: Your Honor, let me make
- 5 several points about that.
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And let me just
- 7 finish.
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: Okay.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And the Residual
- 10 Clause, of course, in Johnson and Davis was --
- 11 was declared unconstitutional. And that -- the
- other side says what you're -- and -- and, by
- the way, it was pointed out that that would lead
- to absurdities, and here we are, and that you're
- trying to jam cases that would have naturally
- 16 fit under the Residual Clause into the other
- 17 clause. So that's what the other side is
- 18 suggesting you're doing.
- 19 MR. FEIGIN: If I could have a second,
- 20 several points on that.
- Number one, I think he's trying to
- 22 have it both ways. He's arguing that Congress
- 23 wouldn't want -- have wanted this to be a crime
- of violence at all, and he's relying on this
- 25 Residual Clause argument.

1 As to the Residual Clause argument, 2 this isn't a case about potential risks, which 3 is what the Residual Clause covers. This is a case where we know somebody dies. I think the 4 Court has not relied on the Residual Clause in 5 6 other cases where it might have equally been 7 applicable under the kind of logic you're 8 suggesting, Justice Kavanaugh, like Stokeling. 9 I think that's because everyone recognizes the 10 Elements Clause has its own specific function. 11 I'd also point you not just to 12 924(c)(3)'s Residual Clause but to the Armed Career Criminal Act's Residual Clause, which is 13 14 worded a little bit differently, although no one 15 thinks it affects the scope of the Elements 16 Clause. It requires a serious potential risk of 17 physical injury. I don't know who could think 18 that that's the way you're capturing murder. 19 doesn't have a serious potential risk of 20 physical injury. Somebody gets harmed. 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes, but, Mr. Feigin 2.2 23 MR. FEIGIN: And then, finally -- I'm 24 sorry. 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: Oh, go ahead.

- 1 ahead. Sorry.
- 2 MR. FEIGIN: And then, finally, I just
- 3 wanted to point out that Section 922(g)(9), the
- 4 definition doesn't appear there. That's in
- 5 Section 921.33(a). The definition of
- 6 "misdemeanor, crime of domestic violence,"
- 7 doesn't even have a Residual Clause.
- 8 And if you look at the appendix we
- 9 submitted in Voisine, most of the assault
- 10 statutes the Court was worried about there are
- 11 defined in terms of causation of harm or
- 12 causation of offense of touching. I thank you
- 13 for your indulgence, Justice Jackson.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. No,
- 15 Mr. Feigin, I -- I appreciate that somebody died
- 16 here and that we would ordinarily think of
- 17 murder in that situation.
- 18 But it's clear that the language of
- 19 this provision of the statute is not focused on
- 20 the outcome or the effect.
- 21 And I think the common-sense reading
- of this that cuts against you is the fact that
- 23 "physical force" has a common-sense meaning,
- "use" has a common-sense meaning and that it
- 25 suggests that the defendant has to act, that

- 1 they have to do something.
- 2 And so Justice Gorsuch's point is --
- about divisibility is kind of my thought, which
- 4 is, at the beginning of this, it seems like we
- 5 have a bifurcation of Congress's view that you
- 6 have action by a defendant and you have omission
- 7 in a different column, and we're sort of in the
- 8 realm of action.
- 9 So I guess my question is, how could
- 10 Congress have possibly written the words "use,
- 11 attempted use, or threatened use of physical
- 12 force" and meant that the defendant doesn't have
- 13 to do anything at all?
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, the --
- this goes back to the common-law backdrop
- 16 against when -- and I -- I think the easiest way
- 17 to see that, that there's some linguistic ways
- 18 to see that to the dictionary definitions.
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I'm just looking
- 20 at the text of the statute. If you're right --
- 21 if you're right that what Congress was trying to
- 22 capture with this is a defendant -- a -- a -- a
- victim dying or a person being bodily -- you
- know, injured bodily, Congress has said that
- 25 many other places, even in this very statute,

- 1 when that was the triggering thing.
- What I'm worried about is interpreting
- 3 the words "use, attempted use, and threatened
- 4 use of physical force" to encompass a situation
- 5 in which a person is not acting. That seems
- 6 completely counterintuitive. It seems like it
- 7 has no bearing in the words of the statute.
- 8 I've already talked with -- with --
- 9 with your friend on the other side about the
- 10 legislative history that actually shows that
- 11 Congress wasn't talking about omissions, but how
- 12 -- how do you get past this sort of conceptual
- concern that we're really talking about doing
- something here and you're suggesting that you
- 15 don't have to?
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, if I
- 17 could respond, I would have, like, three
- 18 principal points --
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes.
- 20 MR. FEIGIN: -- in response to that.
- One of them is you -- the premise of
- 22 your argument -- not argument -- the premise of
- your question was that this statute doesn't look
- 24 at results. But I'd respectfully point the
- 25 Court to Castleman and as well as Justice

- 1 Scalia's current -- concurrence in Castleman,
- 2 which both point out that where you have --
- 3 where you actually have physical injury, it must
- 4 have been caused by physical force.
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: But Castleman was --
- 6 Castleman -- Castleman was dealing with a
- 7 different question, like how much force? What
- 8 is force? Is -- is putting the -- the -- the
- 9 poison in the drink enough to be physical force?
- 10 I'm talking about a situation in which
- 11 a person does nothing.
- 12 MR. FEIGIN: Okay. The second point
- 13 I'd make, Your Honor, and I've been trying to
- make it this morning, and I take as part of your
- question you've kind of rejected this, but I do
- think it fits squarely within the dictionary
- 17 definitions.
- 18 Again, if my car is just rolling down,
- 19 you know, a hill and I see some -- my enemy walk
- in front of me and I let the car keep going and
- just don't do anything, I think we'd all say I
- 22 used physical force. Now maybe I got in the car
- 23 and turned the key and started the car, but I
- 24 certainly didn't have the intent to use physical
- 25 force against the person of another. I only had

1 it at the point I stopped doing something. 2 And the third point I'd make if -- if 3 you'll indulge me one --4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Sure. MR. FEIGIN: -- second longer, Chief 5 6 -- Mr. Chief Justice, thank you -- is that I 7 don't think this would have defied common sense because, again, if you look at all the 8 9 common-law sources, everyone recognizes this is 10 a word game. Do I call it withholding, do I 11 call it not acting when I refuse to give someone 12 medicine? And the common law has always treated 13 doing something other than what you're supposed 14 to do, fiddling while Rome burns, as an 15 affirmative act. 16 Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice. 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 18 counsel. 19 Justice Thomas? 20 Justice Alito? 21 Justice Sotomayor? 2.2 Justice Barrett? 23 Justice Jackson? 24 MR. FEIGIN: Okay. Thank you. 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

1	counsel.
2	Rebuttal, Mr. Kedem?
3	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ALLON KEDEM
4	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
5	MR. KEDEM: Thank you, Your Honor.
6	Starting first with divisibility, when
7	this Court has asked whether a statute is
8	divisible for purposes of the categorical
9	approach, it is asking whether it is
10	linguistically divisible, whether the text of
11	the statute allows it to be divided into
12	separate offenses.
13	Sometimes there are a list of
14	different ways of committing an offense.
15	Sometimes they are different offenses. So you
16	could say that it involve burglary involves
17	breaking into a house or a houseboat or
18	whatever, and then the question is, is house a
19	different crime than houseboat? But it has to
20	be linguistically divisible. You don't look at
21	and you can look at state, common law, or
22	otherwise to figure out whether those are
23	different elements or means, but you don't look
24	at at at case law generally to ask whether
25	omissions are different offenses than not. That

- 1 is what my friend is asking you to do, something
- 2 this Court has never done.
- And, at minimum, if you're going to
- 4 start to engage in that kind of divisibility in
- 5 an entirely new realm, I would think that you'd
- 6 want a case where that issue had been raised and
- 7 briefed.
- 8 My friend also said that essentially
- 9 the only question about whether all the statutes
- in its appendix are out is a question about
- 11 divisibility. We respectfully disagree. States
- can agree with the general principle, as I think
- all of them do, that omissions can sometimes be
- 14 liable. They can accept the common-law
- 15 principle but still believe that certain
- 16 specific offenses cannot be committed except by
- 17 affirmative acts.
- We have cases in our brief, in our
- 19 reply brief, in, for instance, Louisiana, which
- 20 accepts the general principle but nevertheless
- 21 says that felony murder cannot be committed
- 22 except by an affirmative act because it is
- 23 written in a way that requires a killing. And
- 24 so you have a number of those statutes even in
- 25 those effective states that wouldn't necessarily

- 1 be excluded.
- 2 Going to the Residual Clause, the
- 3 Residual Clause is a natural home for offenses
- 4 like murder not because murder isn't always bad
- 5 but precisely because it is usually bad. In
- 6 other words, the vast majority of murders are,
- 7 in fact, violent, which is why it makes sense to
- 8 fall under a clause that talks about the risk in
- 9 an ordinary case that physical force against
- 10 another will be used during the course of
- 11 commission. It allows for these sorts of edge
- 12 cases, the difficult hypotheticals that we've
- 13 been talking about.
- 14 The Elements Clause is not written
- 15 that way. It requires the use of violent
- 16 physical force as an element, which means in
- 17 absolutely every case. And my friend does not
- 18 dispute that there is no interpretive
- 19 significance to the fact that the Residual
- 20 Clause is no -- no longer operative.
- 21 Going to the word "use," my friend
- 22 says that "use" derives some meaning from the
- 23 common law. This Court in Bailey said "use"
- 24 must be given its ordinary meaning, which is
- 25 active employment. And you notice that when my

- 1 friend started talking about using things like
- 2 metabolism or the body's natural processes, he
- 3 lapsed into this sort of abstract concept speak
- 4 rather than talking about something physical,
- 5 like physical force that you use against the
- 6 person of another.
- 7 Castleman. Castleman examples are all
- 8 indirect force, poison, pulling the trigger of a
- 9 gun, introducing a disease, by which I think the
- 10 Court meant, if you infect someone with the
- 11 Ebola virus, obviously, that's an indirect use
- of violent physical force. But they're all
- taking steps to bring someone into contact with
- 14 the thing, without which, without the step you
- take to bring them into contact with it, there
- 16 would be no harm whatsoever. So it's not a word
- 17 game.
- 18 Whether you describe, you know,
- 19 failing to feed someone as an act of withholding
- or an omission, either way, you are not bringing
- 21 them into contact with any force, much less
- 22 violent physical force.
- 23 My friend relied very heavily on the
- common law, as their brief does as well. He
- 25 says that acts of omission are treated as other

- 1 acts. And that, as a general principle, makes
- 2 sense for liability. But the problem with the
- 3 government's argument on that is none of those
- 4 terms make their appearance in the Elements
- 5 Clause, which talks about the use of violent
- 6 physical force. That's the thing that has to be
- 7 present in each case.
- 8 And that's why, to your question,
- 9 Justice Barrett, Stokeling is different because
- 10 it was interpreting a common law term of art
- which appeared both in the federal provision and
- in the state provision. We're not here
- interpreting words, "act" or "omission." We're
- interpreting "use of violent physical force."
- 15 Finally, I want to end with a point
- about all these hard examples. You posed a lot
- of very difficult hypotheticals both to me and
- 18 my friend from the government. And the thing is
- 19 you don't have to agree with us on essentially
- any of them, except the pure omission scenario,
- 21 where there's an octogenarian who falls into a
- 22 coma and slowly expires because they are not
- 23 being fed nutrition. No one would describe that
- as a death involving violent physical force,
- 25 except for perhaps the government, which thinks

Т	that literally every death involves violent
2	physical force.
3	But, if that in a sort of normal
4	scenario is not a death involving violent
5	physical force, it doesn't suddenly become
6	violent physical force because there was someone
7	who had a legal duty to provide that nutrition.
8	It may be a very serious crime. It can be
9	punished severely, but it does not categorically
10	involve the use of violent physical force.
11	Thank you.
12	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
13	counsel. The case is submitted.
14	(Whereupon, at 12:16 p.m., the case
15	was submitted.)
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