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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

8 CFR Part 208

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Executive Office for Immigration Review

8 CFR Parts 1003 and 1208

[EOIR Docket No. 19-0504; A.G. Order No. 4488-2019]

RIN 1125-AA91

Asylum Eligibility and Procedural Modifications

AGENCY: Executive Office for Immigration Review, Department of Justice; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security.

ACTION: Interim final rule; request for comment.

SUMMARY: The Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security (“DOJ,” “DHS,” or collectively, “the Departments”) are adopting an interim final rule (“interim rule” or “rule”) governing asylum claims in the context of aliens who enter or attempt to enter the United States across the southern land border after failing to apply for protection from persecution or torture while in a third country through which they transited en route to the United States. Pursuant to statutory authority, the Departments are amending their respective regulations to provide that, with limited exceptions, an alien who enters or attempts to enter the United States across the southern border after failing to apply for protection in a third country outside the alien’s country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence through which the alien transited en route to the United States is ineligible for asylum. This basis for asylum ineligibility applies only prospectively to aliens who enter or arrive in the United States on or

after the effective date of this rule. In addition to establishing a new mandatory bar for asylum eligibility for aliens who enter or attempt to enter the United States across the southern border after failing to apply for protection from persecution or torture in at least one third country through which they transited en route to the United States, this rule would also require asylum officers and immigration judges to apply this new bar on asylum eligibility when administering the credible-fear screening process applicable to stowaways and aliens who are subject to expedited removal under section 235(b)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The new bar established by this regulation does not modify withholding or deferral of removal proceedings. Aliens who fail to apply for protection in a third country of transit may continue to apply for withholding of removal under the Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”) and deferral of removal under regulations issued pursuant to the legislation implementing U.S. obligations under Article 3 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

DATES: *Effective date:* This rule is effective [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

Submission of public comments: Written or electronic comments must be submitted on or before [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. Written comments postmarked on or before that date will be considered timely. The electronic Federal Docket Management System will accept comments prior to midnight eastern standard time at the end of that day.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by EOIR Docket No. 19-0504, by one of the following methods:

• *Federal eRulemaking Portal*: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

• *Mail*: Lauren Alder Reid, Assistant Director, Office of Policy, Executive Office for Immigration Review, 5107 Leesburg Pike, Suite 2616, Falls Church, VA 22041. To ensure proper handling, please reference EOIR Docket No. 19-0504 on your correspondence. This mailing address may be used for paper, disk, or CD-ROM submissions.

• *Hand Delivery/Courier*: Lauren Alder Reid, Assistant Director, Office of Policy, Executive Office for Immigration Review, 5107 Leesburg Pike, Suite 2616, Falls Church, VA 22041. Contact Telephone Number (703) 305-0289 (not a toll-free call).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lauren Alder Reid, Assistant Director, Office of Policy, Executive Office for Immigration Review, 5107 Leesburg Pike, Suite 2616, Falls Church, VA 22041. Contact Telephone Number (703) 305-0289 (not a toll-free call).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Public Participation

Interested persons are invited to participate in this rulemaking by submitting written data, views, or arguments on all aspects of this rule. The Departments also invite comments that relate to the potential economic or federalism effects that might result from this rule. To provide the most assistance to the Departments, comments should reference a specific portion of the rule; explain the reason for any recommended change; and include data, information, or authority that supports the recommended change. Comments received will be considered and addressed in the process of drafting the final rule.

All comments submitted for this rulemaking should include the agency name and EOIR Docket No. 19-0504. Please note that all comments received are considered part of the public

record and made available for public inspection at *www.regulations.gov*. Such information includes personally identifiable information (such as a person's name, address, or any other data that might personally identify that individual) that the commenter voluntarily submits.

If you want to submit personally identifiable information as part of your comment, but do not want it to be posted online, you must include the phrase "PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION" in the first paragraph of your comment and precisely and prominently identify the information of which you seek redaction.

If you want to submit confidential business information as part of your comment, but do not want it to be posted online, you must include the phrase "CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS INFORMATION" in the first paragraph of your comment and precisely and prominently identify the confidential business information of which you seek redaction. If a comment has so much confidential business information that it cannot be effectively redacted, all or part of that comment may not be posted on *www.regulations.gov*. Personally identifiable information and confidential business information provided as set forth above will be placed in the public docket file of DOJ's Executive Office for Immigration Review ("EOIR"), but not posted online. To inspect the public docket file in person, you must make an appointment with EOIR. Please see the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT paragraph above for the contact information specific to this rule.

II. Purpose of This Interim Rule

As discussed further below, asylum is a discretionary immigration benefit that generally can be sought by eligible aliens who are physically present or arriving in the United States, irrespective of their status, as provided in section 208 of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1158. Congress, however, has provided that certain categories of aliens cannot receive asylum and has further

delegated to the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security (“Secretary”) the authority to promulgate regulations establishing additional bars on eligibility to the extent consistent with the asylum statute, as well as the authority to establish “any other conditions or limitations on the consideration of an application for asylum” that are consistent with the INA. *See* INA 208(b)(2)(C), (d)(5)(B), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C), (d)(5)(B). This interim rule will limit aliens’ eligibility for this discretionary benefit if they enter or attempt to enter the United States across the southern land border after failing to apply for protection in at least one third country through which they transited en route to the United States, subject to limited exceptions.

The United States has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of aliens encountered along or near the southern land border with Mexico. This increase corresponds with a sharp increase in the number, and percentage, of aliens claiming fear of persecution or torture when apprehended or encountered by DHS. For example, over the past decade, the overall percentage of aliens subject to expedited removal and referred, as part of the initial screening process, for a credible-fear interview on claims of a fear of return has jumped from approximately 5 percent to above 40 percent. The number of cases referred to DOJ for proceedings before an immigration judge has also risen sharply, more than tripling between 2013 and 2018. These numbers are projected to continue to increase throughout the remainder of Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2019 and beyond. Only a small minority of these individuals, however, are ultimately granted asylum.

The large number of meritless asylum claims places an extraordinary strain on the nation’s immigration system, undermines many of the humanitarian purposes of asylum, has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis of human smuggling, and affects the United States’ ongoing diplomatic negotiations with foreign countries. This rule mitigates the strain on the country’s

immigration system by more efficiently identifying aliens who are misusing the asylum system to enter and remain in the United States rather than legitimately seeking urgent protection from persecution or torture. Aliens who transited through another country where protection was available, and yet did not seek protection, may fall within that category.

Apprehending the great number of aliens crossing illegally into the United States and processing their credible-fear and asylum claims consumes an inordinate amount of resources of the Departments. DHS must surveil, apprehend, screen, and process the aliens who enter the country. DHS must also devote significant resources to detain many aliens pending further proceedings and to represent the United States in immigration court proceedings. The large influx of aliens also consumes substantial resources of DOJ, whose immigration judges adjudicate aliens' claims and whose officials are responsible for prosecuting and maintaining custody over those who violate Federal criminal law. Despite DOJ deploying close to double the number of immigration judges as in 2010 and completing historic numbers of cases, currently more than 900,000 cases are pending before the immigration courts. This represents an increase of more than 100,000 cases (or a greater than 13 percent increase in the number of pending cases) since the start of FY 2019. And this increase is on top of an already sizeable jump over the previous five years in the number of cases pending before immigration judges. From the end of FY 2013 to the close of FY 2018, the number of pending cases more than doubled, increasing nearly 125 percent.

That increase is owing, in part, to the continued influx of aliens and record numbers of asylum applications being filed: more than 436,000 of the currently pending immigration cases include an asylum application. But a large majority of the asylum claims raised by those apprehended at the southern border are ultimately determined to be without merit. The strain on

the immigration system from those meritless cases has been extreme and extends to the judicial system. The INA provides many asylum-seekers with rights of appeal to the Article III courts of the United States. Final disposition of asylum claims, even those that lack merit, can take years and significant government resources to resolve, particularly where Federal courts of appeals grant stays of removal when appeals are filed. *See De Leon v. INS*, 115 F.3d 643 (9th Cir. 1997).

The rule's bar on asylum eligibility for aliens who fail to apply for protection in at least one third country through which they transit en route to the United States also aims to further the humanitarian purposes of asylum. It prioritizes individuals who are unable to obtain protection from persecution elsewhere and individuals who are victims of a "severe form of trafficking in persons" as defined by 8 CFR 214.11, many of whom do not volitionally transit through a third country to reach the United States. By deterring meritless asylum claims and de-prioritizing the applications of individuals who could have obtained protection in another country, the Departments seek to ensure that those refugees who have no alternative to U.S.-based asylum relief or have been subjected to an extreme form of human trafficking are able to obtain relief more quickly.

Additionally, the rule seeks to curtail the humanitarian crisis created by human smugglers bringing men, women, and children across the southern border. By reducing the incentive for aliens without an urgent or genuine need for asylum to cross the border—in the hope of a lengthy asylum process that will enable them to remain in the United States for years, typically free from detention and with work authorization, despite their statutory ineligibility for relief—the rule aims to reduce human smuggling and its tragic effects.

Finally, the rule aims to aid the United States in its negotiations with foreign nations on migration issues. Addressing the eligibility for asylum of aliens who enter or attempt to enter the

United States after failing to seek protection in at least one third country through which they transited en route to the United States will better position the United States as it engages in ongoing diplomatic negotiations with Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) regarding migration issues in general, related measures employed to control the flow of aliens into the United States (such as the recently implemented Migrant Protection Protocols¹), and the urgent need to address the humanitarian and security crisis along the southern land border between the United States and Mexico.

In sum, this rule provides that, with limited exceptions, an alien who enters or arrives in the United States across the southern land border is ineligible for the discretionary benefit of asylum unless he or she applied for and received a final judgment denying protection in at least one third country through which he or she transited en route to the United States. The alien would, however, remain eligible to apply for statutory withholding of removal and for deferral of removal under the CAT.

In order to alleviate the strain on the U.S. immigration system and more effectively provide relief to those most in need of asylum—victims of a severe form of trafficking and refugees who have no other option—this rule incorporates the eligibility bar on asylum into the credible-fear screening process applicable to stowaways and aliens placed in expedited removal proceedings.

III. Background

A. Joint Interim Rule

The Attorney General and the Secretary publish this joint interim rule pursuant to their respective authorities concerning asylum determinations.

¹ See Notice of Availability for Policy Guidance Related to Implementation of the Migrant Protection Protocols, 84 FR 6811 (Feb. 28, 2019).

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (“HSA”), Public Law 107–296, as amended, transferred many functions related to the execution of Federal immigration law to the newly created DHS. The HSA charged the Secretary “with the administration and enforcement of this chapter and all other laws relating to the immigration and naturalization of aliens,” 8 U.S.C. 1103(a)(1), and granted the Secretary the power to take all actions “necessary for carrying out” the provisions of the INA, *id.* at 1103(a)(3). The HSA also transferred to DHS some responsibility for affirmative asylum applications, i.e., applications for asylum made outside the removal context. *See* 6 U.S.C. 271(b)(3). That authority has been delegated within DHS to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”). USCIS asylum officers determine in the first instance whether an alien’s affirmative asylum application should be granted. *See* 8 CFR 208.4(b), 208.9.

But the HSA retained authority over certain individual immigration adjudications (including those related to defensive asylum applications) for DOJ, under EOIR and subject to the direction and regulation of the Attorney General. *See* 6 U.S.C. 521; 8 U.S.C. 1103(g). Thus, immigration judges within DOJ continue to adjudicate all asylum applications made by aliens during the removal process (defensive asylum applications), and they also review affirmative asylum applications referred by USCIS to the immigration court. *See* INA 101(b)(4), 8 U.S.C. 1101(b)(4); 8 CFR 1208.2; *Dhakal v. Sessions*, 895 F.3d 532, 536–37 (7th Cir. 2018) (describing affirmative and defensive asylum processes). The Board of Immigration Appeals (Board), also within DOJ, hears appeals from certain decisions by immigration judges. 8 CFR 1003.1(b)–(d). Asylum-seekers may appeal certain Board decisions to the Article III courts of the United States. *See* INA 242(a), 8 U.S.C. 1252(a).

The HSA also provided “[t]hat determination and ruling by the Attorney General with respect to all questions of law shall be controlling.” INA 103(a)(1), 8 U.S.C. 1103(a)(1). This broad division of functions and authorities informs the background of this interim rule.

B. Legal Framework for Asylum

Asylum is a form of discretionary relief under section 208 of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1158, that generally, if granted, keeps an alien from being subject to removal, creates a path to lawful permanent resident status and U.S. citizenship, and affords a variety of other benefits, such as allowing certain alien family members to obtain lawful immigration status derivatively. *See R-S-C v. Sessions*, 869 F.3d 1176, 1180 (10th Cir. 2017); *see also, e.g.*, INA 208(c)(1)(A), (C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(c)(1)(A), (C) (asylees cannot be removed subject to certain exceptions and can travel abroad with prior consent); INA 208(c)(1)(B), (d)(2), 8 U.S.C. 1158(c)(1)(B), (d)(2) (asylees shall be given work authorization; asylum applicants may be granted work authorization 180 days after the filing of their applications); INA 208(b)(3), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(3) (allowing derivative asylum for an asylee’s spouse and unmarried children); INA 209(b), 8 U.S.C. 1159(b) (allowing the Attorney General or Secretary to adjust the status of an asylee to that of a lawful permanent resident); 8 CFR 209.2; 8 U.S.C. 1612(a)(2)(A) (asylees are eligible for certain Federal means-tested benefits on a preferential basis compared to most legal permanent residents); INA 316(a), 8 U.S.C. 1427(a) (describing requirements for the naturalization of lawful permanent residents).

Aliens applying for asylum must establish that they meet the definition of a “refugee,” that they are not subject to a bar to the granting of asylum, and that they merit a favorable exercise of discretion. INA 208(b)(1), 240(c)(4)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(1), 8 U.S.C. 1229a(c)(4)(A); *see Moncrieffe v. Holder*, 569 U.S. 184, 187 (2013) (describing asylum as a

form of “discretionary relief from removal”); *Delgado v. Mukasey*, 508 F.3d 702, 705 (2d Cir. 2007) (“Asylum is a discretionary form of relief Once an applicant has established eligibility . . . it remains within the Attorney General’s discretion to deny asylum.”). Because asylum is a discretionary form of relief from removal, the alien bears the burden of showing both eligibility for asylum and why the Attorney General or Secretary should exercise the discretion to grant relief. *See* INA 208(b)(1), 240(c)(4)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(1), 1229a(c)(4)(A)(ii); 8 CFR 1240.8(d); *see Romilus v. Ashcroft*, 385 F.3d 1, 8 (1st Cir. 2004).

Section 208 of the INA provides that, in order to apply for asylum, an applicant must be “physically present” or “arriving” in the United States, INA 208(a)(1), 8 U.S.C. 1158(a)(1). Furthermore, to obtain asylum, the alien must demonstrate that he or she meets the statutory definition of a “refugee,” INA 208(b)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(1)(A), and is not subject to an exception or bar, INA 208(b)(2), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2); 8 CFR 1240.8(d). The alien bears the burden of proof to establish that he or she meets these criteria. INA 208(b)(1)(B)(i), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(1)(B)(i); 8 CFR 1240.8(d).

For an alien to establish that he or she is a “refugee,” the alien generally must be someone who is outside of his or her country of nationality and “is unable or unwilling to return to . . . that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” INA 101(a)(42)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(42)(A). In addition, if evidence indicates that one or more of the grounds for mandatory denial may apply, *see* INA 208(b)(2)(A)(i)–(vi), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(A)(i)–(vi), an alien must show not only that he or she does not fit within one of the statutory bars to granting asylum but also that he or she is not subject to any “additional limitations and conditions . . . under which an alien shall be ineligible for asylum” established by a regulation that is

“consistent with” section 208 of the INA, *see* INA 208(b)(2)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C). The asylum applicant bears the burden of establishing that the bar at issue does not apply. 8 CFR 1240.8(d); *see also, e.g., Rendon v. Mukasey*, 520 F.3d 967, 973 (9th Cir. 2008) (applying 8 CFR 1240.8(d) in the context of the aggravated felony bar to asylum); *Chen v. U.S. Att’y Gen.*, 513 F.3d 1255, 1257 (11th Cir. 2008) (applying 8 CFR 1240.8(d) in the context of the persecutor bar); *Gao v. U.S. Att’y Gen.*, 500 F.3d 93, 98 (2d Cir. 2007) (same).

Because asylum is a discretionary benefit, those aliens who are statutorily eligible for asylum (i.e., those who meet the definition of “refugee” and are not subject to a mandatory bar) are not entitled to it. After demonstrating eligibility, aliens must further meet their burden of showing that the Attorney General or Secretary should exercise his or her discretion to grant asylum. *See* INA 208(b)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(1)(A) (the “Secretary of Homeland Security or the Attorney General may grant asylum to an alien” who applies in accordance with the required procedures and meets the definition of a “refugee”). The asylum statute’s grant of discretion “[i]s a broad delegation of power, which restricts the Attorney General’s discretion to grant asylum only by requiring the Attorney General to first determine that the asylum applicant is a ‘refugee.’” *Komarenko v. INS*, 35 F.3d 432, 436 (9th Cir. 1994), *overruled on other grounds by Abebe v. Mukasey*, 554 F.3d 1203 (9th Cir. 2009) (en banc) (per curiam). Immigration judges and asylum officers exercise that delegated discretion on a case-by-case basis.

C. Establishing Bars to Asylum

The availability of asylum has long been qualified both by statutory bars and by administrative discretion to create additional bars. Those bars have developed over time in a back-and-forth process between Congress and the Attorney General. The original asylum statute, as set out in the Refugee Act of 1980, Public Law 96–212, simply directed the Attorney

General to “establish a procedure for an alien physically present in the United States or at a land border or port of entry, irrespective of such alien’s status, to apply for asylum, and the alien may be granted asylum in the discretion of the Attorney General if the Attorney General determines that such alien is a refugee” within the meaning of the INA. *See* 8 U.S.C. 1158(a) (1982); *see also INS v. Cardoza-Fonseca*, 480 U.S. 421, 427–29 (1987) (describing the 1980 provisions).

In the 1980 implementing regulations, the Attorney General, in his discretion, established several mandatory bars to granting asylum that were modeled on the mandatory bars to eligibility for withholding of deportation under the then-existing section 243(h) of the INA. *See* Refugee and Asylum Procedures, 45 FR 37392, 37392 (June 2, 1980). Those regulations required denial of an asylum application if it was determined that (1) the alien was “not a refugee within the meaning of section 101(a)(42)” of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(42); (2) the alien had been “firmly resettled in a foreign country” before arriving in the United States; (3) the alien “ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group, or political opinion”; (4) the alien had “been convicted by a final judgment of a particularly serious crime” and therefore constituted “a danger to the community of the United States”; (5) there were “serious reasons for considering that the alien ha[d] committed a serious nonpolitical crime outside the United States prior to the arrival of the alien in the United States”; or (6) there were “reasonable grounds for regarding the alien as a danger to the security of the United States.” *See* 45 FR at 37394–95.

In 1990, the Attorney General substantially amended the asylum regulations while retaining the mandatory bars for aliens who (1) persecuted others on account of a protected ground; (2) were convicted of a particularly serious crime in the United States; (3) firmly resettled in another country; or (4) presented reasonable grounds to be regarded as a danger to

the security of the United States. *See* Asylum and Withholding of Deportation Procedures, 55 FR 30674, 30683 (July 27, 1990); *see also* *Yang v. INS*, 79 F.3d 932, 936–39 (9th Cir. 1996) (upholding firm-resettlement bar); *Komarenko*, 35 F.3d at 436 (upholding particularly-serious-crime bar), *abrogated on other grounds*, *Abebe v. Mukasey*, 554 F.3d 1203 (9th Cir. 2009) (en banc). In the Immigration Act of 1990, Congress added an additional mandatory bar to applying for or being granted asylum for “an[y] alien who has been convicted of an aggravated felony.” Public Law 101–649, sec. 515 (1990).

In the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (“IIRIRA”), Public Law 104–208, div. C, and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, Public Law 104–132, Congress amended section 208 of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1158, to include the asylum provisions in effect today: Among other things, Congress designated three categories of aliens who, with limited exceptions, are ineligible to apply for asylum: (1) aliens who can be removed to a safe third country pursuant to a bilateral or multilateral agreement; (2) aliens who failed to apply for asylum within one year of arriving in the United States; and (3) aliens who have previously applied for asylum and had the application denied. Public Law 104-208, div. C, sec. 604(a); *see* INA 208(a)(2)(A)–(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(a)(2)(A)–(C). Congress also adopted six mandatory bars to granting asylum, which largely tracked the pre-existing asylum regulations. These bars prohibited asylum for (1) aliens who “ordered, incited, or otherwise participated” in the persecution of others on account of a protected ground; (2) aliens convicted of a “particularly serious crime” in the United States; (3) aliens who committed a “serious nonpolitical crime outside the United States” before arriving in the United States; (4) aliens who are a “danger to the security of the United States”; (5) aliens who are inadmissible or removable under a set of specified grounds relating to terrorist activity; and (6) aliens who have “firmly resettled in

another country prior to arriving in the United States.” Public Law 104–208, div. C, sec. 604(a); *see* INA 208(b)(2)(A)(i)–(vi), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(A)(i)–(vi). Congress further added that aggravated felonies, defined in 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(43), would be considered “particularly serious crime[s].” Public Law 104–208, div. C, sec. 604(a); *see* INA 201(a)(43), 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(43).

Although Congress enacted specific bars to asylum eligibility, that statutory list is not exhaustive. Congress, in IIRIRA, expressly authorized the Attorney General to expand upon two of those exceptions—the bars for “particularly serious crimes” and “serious nonpolitical offenses.” While Congress prescribed that all aggravated felonies constitute particularly serious crimes, Congress further provided that the Attorney General may “designate by regulation offenses that will be considered” a “particularly serious crime,” the perpetrator of which “constitutes a danger to the community of the United States.” Public Law 104–208, div. C, sec. 604(a); *see* INA 208(b)(2)(A)(ii), (B)(ii), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(A)(ii), (B)(ii). Courts and the Board have long held that this grant of authority also authorizes the Board to identify additional particularly serious crimes (beyond aggravated felonies) through case-by-case adjudication. *See, e.g., Delgado v. Holder*, 648 F.3d 1095, 1106 (9th Cir. 2011) (en banc) (finding that Congress’s decisions over time to amend the particularly serious crime bar by statute did not call into question the Board’s additional authority to name serious crimes via case-by-case adjudication); *Ali v. Achim*, 468 F.3d 462, 468-69 (7th Cir. 2006) (relying on the absence of an explicit statutory mandate that the Attorney General designate “particular serious crimes” *only* via regulation). Congress likewise authorized the Attorney General to designate by regulation offenses that constitute “a serious nonpolitical crime outside the United States prior to the arrival

of the alien in the United States.” Public Law 104–208, div. C, sec. 604(a); *see* INA 208(b)(2)(A)(iii), (B)(ii), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(A)(iii), (B)(ii).²

Congress further provided the Attorney General with the authority, by regulation, to “establish additional limitations and conditions, consistent with [section 208 of the INA], under which an alien shall be ineligible for asylum under paragraph (1).” Public Law 104–208, div. C, sec. 604(a); *see* INA 208(b)(2)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C). As the Tenth Circuit has recognized, “the statute clearly empowers” the Attorney General and the Secretary to “adopt[] further limitations” on asylum eligibility. *R-S-C*, 869 F.3d at 1187 & n.9. By allowing the creation by regulation of “additional limitations and conditions,” the statute gives the Attorney General and the Secretary broad authority in determining what the “limitations and conditions” should be. The additional limitations on eligibility must be established “by regulation,” and must be “consistent with” the rest of section 208 of the INA. INA 208(b)(2)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C).

Thus, the Attorney General has previously invoked section 208(b)(2)(C) of the INA to limit eligibility for asylum based on a “fundamental change in circumstances” and on the ability of an applicant to safely relocate internally within the alien’s country of nationality or of last habitual residence. *See Asylum Procedures*, 65 FR 76121, 76126 (Dec. 6, 2000). More recently, the Attorney General and Secretary invoked section 208(b)(2)(C) to limit eligibility for asylum for aliens subject to a bar on entry under certain presidential proclamations. *See Aliens Subject to a Bar on Entry Under Certain Presidential Proclamations; Procedures for Protection Claims*, 83 FR 55934 (Nov. 9, 2018).³ The courts have also viewed section 208(b)(2)(C) as conferring

² These provisions continue to refer only to the Attorney General, but the Departments interpret the provisions to also apply to the Secretary by operation of the HSA, Pub. L. 107-296. *See* 6 U.S.C. 552; 8 U.S.C. 1103(a)(1).

³ This rule is currently subject to a preliminary injunction against its enforcement. *See East Bay Sanctuary Covenant v. Trump*, 354 F. Supp. 3d 1094, 1115, 1121 (N.D. Cal. 2018), *on remand from* 909 F.3d 1219 (9th Cir. 2018).

broad discretion, including to render aliens ineligible for asylum based on fraud. *See R-S-C*, 869 F.3d at 1187; *Nijjar v. Holder*, 689 F.3d 1077, 1082 (9th Cir. 2012) (noting that fraud can be “one of the ‘additional limitations . . . under which an alien shall be ineligible for asylum’ that the Attorney General is authorized to establish by regulation”).

Section 208(d)(5) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1158(d)(5), also establishes certain procedures for consideration of asylum applications. But Congress specified that the Attorney General “may provide by regulation for any other conditions or limitations on the consideration of an application for asylum,” so long as those limitations are “not inconsistent with this chapter.” INA 208(d)(5)(B), 8 U.S.C. 1158(d)(5)(B).

In sum, the current statutory framework leaves the Attorney General (and, after the HSA, also the Secretary) significant discretion to adopt additional bars to asylum eligibility. As noted above, when creating mandatory bars to asylum eligibility in the IIRIRA, Congress simultaneously delegated the authority to create additional bars in section 1158(b)(2)(C). Public Law 104-208, sec. 604 (codified at 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)). Pursuant to this broad delegation of authority, the Attorney General and the Secretary have in the past acted to protect the integrity of the asylum system by limiting eligibility for those who do not truly require this country’s protection, and do so again here. *See, e.g.*, 83 FR at 55944; 65 FR at 76126.

In promulgating this rule, the Departments rely on the broad authority granted by 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C) to protect the “core regulatory purpose” of asylum law by prioritizing applicants “with nowhere else to turn.” *Matter of B-R-*, 26 I&N Dec. 119, 122 (BIA 2013) (internal quotation marks omitted) (explaining that, in light of asylum law’s “core regulatory purpose,” several provisions of the U.S. Code “limit an alien’s ability to claim asylum in the United States when other safe options are available”). Such prioritization is consistent with the

purpose of the statutory firm-resettlement bar (8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(A)(vi)), which likewise was implemented to limit the availability of asylum for those who are seeking to choose among a number of safe countries. *See Sall v. Gonzales*, 437 F.3d 229, 233 (2d Cir. 2006); *Matter of A-G-G-*, 25 I&N Dec. 486, 503 (BIA 2011); *see also* 8 U.S.C. 1158(a)(2)(A) (providing that aliens who may be removed, pursuant to a bilateral or multilateral agreement, to a safe third country may not apply for asylum, and further demonstrating the intention of Congress to afford asylum protection only to those applicants who cannot seek effective protection in third countries). The concern with avoiding such forum-shopping has only been heightened by the dramatic increase in aliens entering or arriving in the United States along the southern border after transiting through one or more third countries where they could have sought protection, but did not. *See infra* at 33–41; *Kalubi v. Ashcroft*, 364 F.3d 1134, 1140 (9th Cir. 2004) (noting that forum-shopping might be “part of the totality of circumstances that sheds light on a request for asylum in this country”). While under the current regulatory regime the firm-resettlement bar applies only in circumstances in which offers of permanent status have been extended by third countries, *see* 8 CFR 208.15, 1208.15, the additional bar created by this rule also seeks—like the firm-resettlement bar—to deny asylum protection to those persons effectively choosing among several countries where avenues to protection from return to persecution are available by waiting until they reach the United States to apply for protection. *See Sall*, 437 F.3d at 233. Thus, the rule is well within the authority conferred by section 208(b)(2)(C).

D. Other Forms of Protection

Aliens who are not eligible to apply for or receive a grant of asylum, or who are denied asylum on the basis of the Attorney General’s or the Secretary’s discretion, may nonetheless qualify for protection from removal under other provisions of the immigration laws. A defensive

application for asylum that is submitted by an alien in removal proceedings is deemed an application for statutory withholding of removal under section 241(b)(3) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1231(b)(3). *See* 8 CFR 208.30(e)(2)–(4); 8 CFR 1208.16(a). And an immigration judge may also consider an alien’s eligibility for withholding and deferral of removal under regulations issued pursuant to the implementing legislation regarding U.S. obligations under Article 3 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (“CAT”). *See* Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Public Law 105-277, sec. 2242(b) (1998); 8 CFR 1208.13(c); 8 CFR 1208.3(b), *see also* 8 CFR 1208.16(c) and 1208.17.

Those forms of protection bar an alien’s removal to any country where the alien would “more likely than not” face persecution or torture, meaning that the alien would face a clear probability that his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of a protected ground or a clear probability of torture. 8 CFR 1208.16(b)(2), (c)(2); *see Kouljinski v. Keisler*, 505 F.3d 534, 544 (6th Cir. 2007); *Sulaiman v. Gonzales*, 429 F.3d 347, 351 (1st Cir. 2005). Thus, if an alien proves that it is more likely than not that the alien’s life or freedom would be threatened on account of a protected ground, but is denied asylum for some other reason—for instance, because of a statutory exception, an eligibility bar adopted by regulation, or a discretionary denial of asylum—the alien nonetheless may be entitled to statutory withholding of removal if not otherwise barred from that form of protection. INA 241(b)(3)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1231(b)(3)(A); 8 CFR 208.16, 1208.16; *see also Garcia v. Sessions*, 856 F.3d 27, 40 (1st Cir. 2017) (“[W]ithholding of removal has long been understood to be a mandatory protection that must be given to certain qualifying aliens, while asylum has never been so understood.”). Likewise, an alien who establishes that he or she will more likely than not face torture in the country of removal will qualify for CAT protection. *See* 8 CFR 208.16(c), 208.17(a), 1208.16(c),

1208.17(a). In contrast to the more generous benefits available through asylum, statutory withholding and CAT protection do not: (1) prohibit the Government from removing the alien to a third country where the alien would not face the requisite probability of persecution or torture (even in the absence of an agreement with that third country); (2) create a path to lawful permanent resident status and citizenship; or (3) afford the same ancillary benefits (such as derivative protection for family members) and access to Federal means-tested public benefits. *See R-S-C*, 869 F.3d at 1180.

E. Implementation of International Treaty Obligations

The framework described above is consistent with certain U.S. obligations under the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (“Refugee Protocol”), which incorporates Articles 2–34 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (“Refugee Convention”), as well as U.S. obligations under Article 3 of the CAT. Neither the Refugee Protocol nor the CAT is self-executing in the United States. *See Khan v. Holder*, 584 F.3d 773, 783 (9th Cir. 2009) (“[T]he [Refugee] Protocol is not self-executing.”); *Auguste v. Ridge*, 395 F.3d 123, 132 (3d Cir. 2005) (the CAT “was not self-executing”). These treaties are not directly enforceable in U.S. law, but some of their obligations have been implemented by domestic legislation. For example, the United States has implemented the non-refoulement provisions of these treaties—i.e., provisions prohibiting the return of an individual to a country where he or she would face persecution or torture—through the withholding of removal provisions at section 241(b)(3) of the INA and the CAT regulations, rather than through the asylum provisions at section 208 of the INA. *See Cardoza-Fonseca*, 480 U.S. at 440–41; Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 at sec. 2242(b); 8 CFR 208.16(b)-(c), 208.17–208.18; 1208.16(b)–(c), 1208.17–1208.18. Limitations on the availability of asylum that do not affect the statutory withholding of removal

or protection under the CAT regulations are consistent with these provisions. *See R-S-C*, 869 F.3d at 1188 & n. 11; *Cazun v. U.S. Att’y Gen.*, 856 F.3d 249, 257 & n.16 (3d Cir. 2017); *Ramirez-Mejia v. Lynch*, 813 F.3d 240, 241 (5th Cir. 2016).

Courts have rejected arguments that the Refugee Convention, as implemented, requires that every qualified refugee receive asylum. For example, the Supreme Court has made clear that Article 34, which concerns the assimilation and naturalization of refugees, is precatory and not mandatory, and, accordingly, does not mandate that all refugees be granted asylum. *See Cardoza-Fonseca*, 480 U.S. at 441. Section 208 of the INA reflects that Article 34 is precatory and not mandatory, and accordingly does not provide that all refugees shall receive asylum. *See id.*; *see also R-S-C*, 869 F.3d at 1188; *Mejia v. Sessions*, 866 F.3d 573, 588 (4th Cir. 2017); *Cazun*, 856 F.3d at 257 & n. 16; *Garcia*, 856 F.3d at 42; *Ramirez-Mejia*, 813 F.3d at 241. As noted above, Congress has also recognized the precatory nature of Article 34 by imposing various statutory exceptions and by authorizing the creation of new bars to asylum eligibility through regulation.

Courts have likewise rejected arguments that other provisions of the Refugee Convention require every refugee to receive asylum. For example, courts have held, in the context of upholding the bar on eligibility for asylum in reinstatement proceedings under section 241(a)(5) of the INA, 8 U.S.C 1231(a)(5), that limiting the ability to apply for asylum does not constitute a prohibited “penalty” under Article 31(1) of the Refugee Convention. *Mejia*, 866 F.3d at 588; *Cazun*, 856 F.3d at 257 & n.16. Courts have also rejected the argument that Article 28 of the Refugee Convention, governing the issuance of international travel documents for refugees “lawfully staying” in a country’s territory, mandates that every person who might qualify for

statutory withholding must also be granted asylum. *R-S-C*, 869 F.3d at 1188; *Garcia*, 856 F.3d at 42.

IV. Regulatory Changes

A. Limitation on Eligibility for Asylum for Aliens Who Enter or Attempt to Enter the United States Across the Southern Land Border After Failing to Apply for Protection in at Least One Country Through Which They Transited En Route to the United States

Pursuant to section 208(b)(2)(C) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C), the Departments are revising 8 CFR 208.13(c) and 8 CFR 1208.13(c) to add a new mandatory bar to eligibility for asylum for an alien who enters or attempts to enter the United States across the southern border, but who did not apply for protection from persecution or torture where it was available in at least one third country outside the alien's country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence through which he or she transited en route to the United States, such as in Mexico via that country's robust protection regime. The bar would be subject to several limited exceptions, for (1) an alien who demonstrates that he or she applied for protection from persecution or torture in at least one of the countries through which the alien transited en route to the United States, and the alien received a final judgment denying the alien protection in such country; (2) an alien who demonstrates that he or she satisfies the definition of "victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons" provided in 8 CFR 214.11; or (3) an alien who has transited en route to the United States through only a country or countries that were not parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol, or the CAT.

In all cases the burden would remain with the alien to establish eligibility for asylum consistent with current law, including—if the evidence indicates that a ground for mandatory

denial applies—the burden to prove that a ground for mandatory denial of the asylum application does not apply. 8 CFR 1240.8(d).

In addition to establishing a new mandatory bar for asylum eligibility for an alien who enters or attempts to enter the United States across the southern border after failing to apply for protection from persecution or torture in at least one third country outside the alien's country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence through which he or she transited en route to the United States, this rule would also modify certain aspects of the process for screening fear claims asserted by such aliens who are subject to expedited removal under section 235(b)(1) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1). Under current procedures, aliens subject to expedited removal may avoid being removed by making a threshold showing of a credible fear of persecution or torture at an initial screening interview. At present, those aliens are often released into the interior of the United States pending adjudication of such claims by an immigration court in removal proceedings under section 240 of the INA, especially if those aliens travel as family units. Once an alien is released, adjudications can take months or years to complete because of the increasing volume of claims and the need to expedite cases in which aliens have been detained. The Departments expect that a substantial proportion of aliens subject to a third-country-transit asylum eligibility bar would be subject to expedited removal, since approximately 234,534 aliens in FY 2018 who presented at a port of entry or were apprehended at the border were referred to expedited-removal proceedings. The procedural changes within expedited removal would be confined to aliens who are ineligible for asylum because they are subject to a regulatory bar for contravening the new mandatory third-country-transit asylum eligibility bar imposed by the present rule.

1. Under existing law, expedited-removal procedures—streamlined procedures for expeditiously reviewing claims and removing certain aliens—apply to those individuals who arrive at a port of entry or those who have entered illegally and are encountered by an immigration officer within 100 miles of the border and within 14 days of entering. *See* INA 235(b), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b); Designating Aliens For Expedited Removal, 69 FR 48877, 48880 (Aug. 11, 2004). To be subject to expedited removal, an alien must also be inadmissible under section 212(a)(6)(C) or (a)(7) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(6)(C) or (a)(7), meaning that the alien has either tried to procure documentation through misrepresentation or lacks such documentation altogether. Thus, an alien encountered in the interior of the United States who entered the country after the publication of this rule imposing the third-country-transit bar and who is not otherwise amenable to expedited removal would be placed in proceedings under section 240 of the INA.

Section 235(b)(1) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1), prescribes procedures in the expedited-removal context for screening an alien's eligibility for asylum. When these provisions were being debated in 1996, the House Judiciary Committee expressed particular concern that “[e]xisting procedures to deny entry to and to remove illegal aliens from the United States are cumbersome and duplicative,” and that “[t]he asylum system has been abused by those who seek to use it as a means of ‘backdoor’ immigration.” H.R. Rep. No. 104-469, pt. 1, at 107 (1996). The Committee accordingly described the purpose of expedited removal and related procedures as “streamlin[ing] rules and procedures in the Immigration and Nationality Act to make it easier to deny admission to inadmissible aliens and easier to remove deportable aliens from the United States.” *Id.* at 157; *see Am. Immigration Lawyers Ass’n v. Reno*, 18 F. Supp. 2d 38, 41 (D.D.C. 1998), *aff’d*, 199 F.3d 1352 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (rejecting several constitutional challenges to

IRIRA and describing the expedited-removal process as a “summary removal process for adjudicating the claims of aliens who arrive in the United States without proper documentation”).

Congress thus provided that aliens “inadmissible under [8 U.S.C.] 1182(a)(6)(C) or 1182(a)(7)” shall be “removed from the United States without further hearing or review unless the alien indicates either an intention to apply for asylum under [8 U.S.C. 1158] or a fear of persecution.” INA 235(b)(1)(A)(i), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(A)(i); *see* INA 235(b)(1)(A)(ii), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(A)(ii) (such aliens shall be referred “for an interview by an asylum officer”). On its face, the statute refers only to proceedings to establish eligibility for an affirmative grant of asylum, not to statutory withholding of removal or CAT protection against removal to a particular country.

An alien referred for a credible-fear interview must demonstrate a “credible fear,” defined as a “significant possibility, taking into account the credibility of the statements made by the alien in support of the alien’s claim and such other facts as are known to the officer, that the alien could establish eligibility for asylum under [8 U.S.C. 1158].” INA 235(b)(1)(B)(v), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(v). According to the House report, “[t]he credible-fear standard [wa]s designed to weed out non-meritorious cases so that only applicants with a likelihood of success will proceed to the regular asylum process.” H.R. Rep. No. 104-69, at 158.

If the asylum officer determines that the alien lacks a credible fear, then the alien may request review by an immigration judge. INA 235(b)(1)(B)(iii)(III), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(iii)(III). If the immigration judge concurs with the asylum officer’s negative credible-fear determination, then the alien shall be removed from the United States without further review by either the Board or the courts. INA 235(b)(1)(B)(iii)(I), (b)(1)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(iii)(I), (b)(1)(C); INA 242(a)(2)(A)(iii), (e)(5), 8 U.S.C. 1252(a)(2)(A)(iii), (e)(5).

By contrast, if the asylum officer or immigration judge determines that the alien has a credible fear—i.e., “a significant possibility . . . that the alien could establish eligibility for asylum,” INA 235(b)(1)(B)(v), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(v)—then the alien, under current regulations, is placed in section 240 proceedings for a full hearing before an immigration judge, with appeal available to the Board and review in the Federal courts of appeals, *see* INA 235(b)(1)(B)(ii), (b)(2)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(ii), (b)(2)(A); INA 242(a), 8 U.S.C. 1252(a); 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5), 1003.1.

By contrast, section 235 of the INA is silent regarding procedures for the granting of statutory withholding of removal and CAT protection; indeed, section 235 predates the legislation directing implementation of U.S. obligations under Article 3 of the CAT. *See* Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 at sec. 2242(b) (requiring implementation of the CAT); IIRIRA at sec. 302 (revising section 235 of the INA to include procedures for dealing with inadmissible aliens who intend to apply for asylum). The legal standards for ultimately meeting the statutory standards for asylum on the merits versus statutory withholding or CAT protection are also different. Asylum requires an applicant to ultimately establish a “well-founded fear” of persecution, which has been interpreted to mean a “reasonable possibility” of persecution—a “more generous” standard than the “clear probability” of persecution or torture standard that applies to statutory withholding or CAT protection. *See INS v. Stevic*, 467 U.S. 407, 425, 429–30 (1984); *Santosa v. Mukasey*, 528 F.3d 88, 92 & n.1 (1st Cir. 2008); *compare* 8 CFR 1208.13(b)(2)(i)(B), *with* 8 CFR 1208.16(b)(2), (c)(2). As a result, applicants who establish eligibility for asylum are not necessarily eligible for statutory withholding or CAT protection.

Current regulations instruct USCIS adjudicators and immigration judges to treat an alien’s request for asylum in expedited-removal proceedings under section 1225(b) as a request

for statutory withholding and CAT protection as well. *See* 8 CFR 208.13(c)(1), 208.30(e)(2)–(4), 1208.13(c)(1), 1208.16(a). In the context of expedited-removal proceedings, “credible fear of persecution” is defined to mean a “significant possibility” that the alien “could establish eligibility for asylum,” not the CAT or statutory withholding. INA 235(b)(1)(B)(v), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(v). Regulations nevertheless have generally provided that aliens in expedited removal should be subject to the same process and screening standard for considering statutory withholding of removal claims under INA 241(b)(3), 8 U.S.C. 1231(b)(3), and claims for protection under the CAT regulations, as they are for asylum claims. *See* 8 CFR 208.30(e)(2)–(4).

Thus, when the former Immigration and Naturalization Service provided for claims for statutory withholding of removal and CAT protection to be considered in the same expedited-removal proceedings as asylum, the result was that if an alien showed that there was a significant possibility of establishing eligibility for asylum and was therefore referred for removal proceedings under section 240 of the INA, any potential statutory withholding and CAT claims the alien might have had were referred as well. This was done on the assumption that it would not “disrupt[] the streamlined process established by Congress to circumvent meritless claims.” Regulations Concerning the Convention Against Torture, 64 FR 8478, 8485 (Feb. 19, 1999). But while the INA authorizes the Attorney General and Secretary to provide for consideration of statutory withholding and CAT claims together with asylum claims or other matters that may be considered in removal proceedings, the INA does not mandate that approach, *see Foti v. INS*, 375 U.S. 217, 229–30 & n.16 (1963), or that they be considered in the same manner.

Since 1999, regulations also have provided for a distinct “reasonable fear” screening process for certain aliens who are categorically ineligible for asylum and can thus make claims

only for statutory withholding or CAT protection. *See* 8 CFR 208.31. Specifically, if an alien is subject to having a previous order of removal reinstated or is a non-permanent resident alien subject to an administrative order of removal resulting from an aggravated felony conviction, then he or she is categorically ineligible for asylum. *See id.* § 208.31(a), (e). Such an alien can be placed in withholding-only proceedings to adjudicate his statutory withholding or CAT claims, but only if he first establishes a “reasonable fear” of persecution or torture through a screening process that tracks the credible-fear process. *See id.* § 208.31(c), (e).

To establish a reasonable fear of persecution or torture, an alien must establish a “reasonable possibility that [the alien] would be persecuted on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, or a reasonable possibility that he or she would be tortured in the country of removal.” *Id.* § 208.31(c). “This . . . screening process is modeled on the credible-fear screening process, but requires the alien to meet a higher screening standard.” Regulations Concerning the Convention Against Torture, 64 FR at 8485; *see also Garcia v. Johnson*, No. 14-CV-01775, 2014 WL 6657591, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 21, 2014) (describing the aim of the regulations as providing “fair and efficient procedures” in reasonable-fear screening that would comport with U.S. international obligations).

Significantly, when establishing the reasonable-fear screening process, DOJ explained that the two affected categories of aliens should be screened based on the higher reasonable-fear standard because, “[u]nlike the broad class of arriving aliens who are subject to expedited removal, these two classes of aliens are ineligible for asylum,” and may be entitled only to statutory withholding of removal or CAT protection. Regulations Concerning the Convention Against Torture, 64 FR at 8485. “Because the standard for showing entitlement to these forms of protection (a clear probability of persecution or torture) is significantly higher than the standard

for asylum (a well-founded fear of persecution), the screening standard adopted for initial consideration of withholding and deferral requests in these contexts is also higher.” *Id.*

2. Drawing on the established framework for considering whether to grant withholding of removal or CAT protection in the reasonable-fear context, this interim rule establishes a bifurcated screening process for aliens subject to expedited removal who are ineligible for asylum by virtue of falling subject to this rule’s third-country-transit eligibility bar, but who express a fear of return or seek statutory withholding or CAT protection. The Attorney General and Secretary have broad authority to implement the immigration laws, *see* INA 103, 8 U.S.C. 1103, including by establishing regulations, *see* INA 103(a)(3), 8 U.S.C. 1103(a)(3), and to regulate “conditions or limitations on the consideration of an application for asylum,” *id.* 1158(d)(5)(B). Furthermore, the Secretary has the authority—in his “sole and unreviewable discretion,” the exercise of which may be “modified at any time”—to designate additional categories of aliens that will be subject to expedited-removal procedures, so long as the designated aliens have not been admitted or paroled nor continuously present in the United States for two years. INA 235(b)(1)(A)(iii), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(A)(iii). The Departments have frequently invoked these authorities to establish or modify procedures affecting aliens in expedited-removal proceedings, as well as to adjust the categories of aliens subject to particular procedures within the expedited-removal framework.

This rule does not change the credible-fear standard for asylum claims, although the regulation would expand the scope of the inquiry in the process. An alien who is subject to the third-country-transit bar and nonetheless has entered the United States along the southern land border after the effective date of this rule creating the bar would be ineligible for asylum and would thus not be able to establish a “significant possibility . . . [of] eligibility for asylum under

section 1158.” INA 235(b)(1)(B)(v), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(v). Consistent with section 235(b)(1)(B)(iii)(III) of the INA, the alien could still obtain review from an immigration judge regarding whether the asylum officer correctly determined that the alien was subject to a limitation or suspension on entry imposed by the third-country-transit bar. Further, consistent with section 235(b)(1)(B) of the INA, if the immigration judge reversed the asylum officer’s determination, the alien could assert the asylum claim in section 240 proceedings.

Aliens determined to be ineligible for asylum by virtue of falling subject to the third-country-transit bar, however, would still be screened, but in a manner that reflects that their only viable claims could be for statutory withholding or CAT protection pursuant to 8 CFR 208.30(e)(2)–(4) and 1208.16. After determining the alien’s ineligibility for asylum under the credible-fear standard, the asylum officer would apply the long-established reasonable-fear standard to assess whether further proceedings on a possible statutory withholding or CAT protection claim are warranted. If the asylum officer determined that the alien had not established the requisite reasonable fear, the alien then could seek review of that decision from an immigration judge (just as the alien may under existing 8 CFR 208.30 and 208.31), and would be subject to removal only if the immigration judge agreed with the negative reasonable-fear finding. Conversely, if either the asylum officer or the immigration judge determined that the alien cleared the reasonable-fear threshold, the alien would be put in section 240 proceedings, just like aliens who receive a positive credible-fear determination for asylum. Employing a reasonable-fear standard in this context, for this category of ineligible aliens, would be consistent with DOJ’s longstanding rationale that “aliens ineligible for asylum,” who could only be granted statutory withholding of removal or CAT protection, should be subject to a different screening standard that would correspond to the higher bar for actually obtaining these forms of protection.

See Regulations Concerning the Convention Against Torture, 64 FR at 8485 (“Because the standard for showing entitlement to these forms of protection . . . is significantly higher than the standard for asylum[,] . . . the screening standard adopted for initial consideration of withholding and deferral requests in these contexts is also higher.”).

3. The screening process established by the interim rule accordingly will proceed as follows. For an alien subject to expedited removal, DHS will ascertain whether the alien seeks protection, consistent with INA 235(b)(1)(A)(ii), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(A)(ii). All such aliens will continue to go before an asylum officer for screening, consistent with INA 235(b)(1)(B), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B). The asylum officer will ask threshold questions to elicit whether an alien is ineligible for a grant of asylum pursuant to the third-country-transit bar. If there is a significant possibility that the alien is not subject to the eligibility bar (and the alien otherwise demonstrates that there is a significant possibility that he or she can establish eligibility for asylum), then the alien will have established a credible fear.

If, however, an alien lacks a significant possibility of eligibility for asylum because of the third-country-transit bar, then the asylum officer will make a negative credible-fear finding. The asylum officer will then apply the reasonable-fear standard to assess the alien’s claims for statutory withholding of removal or CAT protection.

An alien subject to the third-country-transit asylum eligibility bar who clears the reasonable-fear screening standard will be placed in section 240 proceedings, just as an alien who clears the credible-fear standard will be. In those proceedings, the alien will also have an opportunity to raise whether the alien was correctly identified as subject to the third-country-transit ineligibility bar to asylum, as well as other claims. If an immigration judge determines that the alien was incorrectly identified as subject to the third-country-transit bar, the alien will

be able to apply for asylum. Such aliens can appeal the immigration judge's decision in these proceedings to the Board and then seek review from a Federal court of appeals.

Conversely, an alien who is found to be subject to the third-country-transit asylum eligibility bar and who does not clear the reasonable-fear screening standard can obtain review of both of those determinations before an immigration judge, just as immigration judges currently review negative credible-fear and reasonable-fear determinations. If the immigration judge finds that either determination was incorrect, then the alien will be placed into section 240 proceedings. In reviewing the determinations, the immigration judge will decide de novo whether the alien is subject to the third-country-transit asylum eligibility bar. If, however, the immigration judge affirms both determinations, then the alien will be subject to removal without further appeal, consistent with the existing process under section 235 of the INA. In short, aliens subject to the third-country-transit asylum eligibility bar will be processed through existing procedures by DHS and EOIR in accordance with 8 CFR 208.30 and 1208.30, but will be subject to the reasonable-fear standard as part of those procedures with respect to their statutory withholding and CAT protection claims.

4. The above process will not affect the process in 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5) (to be redesignated as 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5)(i) under this rule) for certain existing statutory bars to asylum eligibility. Under that regulatory provision, many aliens who appear to fall within an existing statutory bar, and thus appear to be ineligible for asylum, can nonetheless be placed in section 240 proceedings and have their asylum claim adjudicated by an immigration judge, if they establish a credible fear of persecution, followed by further review of any denial of their asylum application before the Board and the courts of appeals.

B. Anticipated Effects of the Rule

When the expedited procedures were first implemented approximately two decades ago, very few aliens within those proceedings claimed a fear of persecution. Since then, the numbers have dramatically increased. In FY 2018, USCIS received 99,035 credible-fear claims, a 175 percent increase from five years earlier and a 1,883 percent increase from ten years earlier. FY 2019 is on track to see an even greater increase in claims, with more than 35,000 credible-fear claims received in the first four months of the fiscal year. This unsustainable, increased burden on the U.S. immigration system also extends to DOJ: immigration courts received over 162,000 asylum applications in FY 2018, a 270 percent increase from five years earlier.

This dramatic increase in credible-fear claims has been complicated by a demographic shift in the alien population crossing the southern border from Mexican single adult males to predominantly Central American family units and unaccompanied alien minors. Historically, aliens coming unlawfully to the United States along the southern land border were predominantly Mexican single adult males who generally were removed or who voluntarily departed within 48 hours if they had no legal right to stay in the United States. As of January 2019, more than 60 percent are family units and unaccompanied alien children; 60 percent are non-Mexican. In FY 2017, CBP apprehended 94,285 family units from the Northern Triangle countries at the southern land border. Of those family units, 99 percent remained in the country (as of January 2019). And, while Mexican single adults who are not legally eligible to remain in the United States may be immediately repatriated to Mexico, it is more difficult to expeditiously repatriate family units and unaccompanied alien children not from Mexico or Canada. And the long and arduous journey of children to the United States brings with it a great risk of harm that could be relieved if individuals were to more readily avail themselves of legal protection from persecution in a third country closer to the child's country of origin.

Even though the overall number of apprehensions of illegal aliens was relatively higher two decades ago than it is today (around 1.6 million in 2000), given the demographic of aliens arriving to the United States at that time, they could be processed and removed more quickly, often without requiring detention or lengthy court proceedings. Moreover, apprehension numbers in past years often reflected individuals being apprehended multiple times over the course of a given year.

In recent years, the United States has seen a large increase in the number and proportion of inadmissible aliens subject to expedited removal who claim a fear of persecution or torture and are subsequently placed into removal proceedings before an immigration judge. This is particularly true for non-Mexican aliens, who now constitute the overwhelming majority of aliens encountered along the southern border with Mexico, and the overwhelming majority of aliens who assert claims of fear. But while the number of non-Mexican aliens encountered at the southern border has dramatically increased, a substantial number of such aliens failed to apply for asylum or refugee status in Mexico—despite the availability of a functioning asylum system.

In May of FY 2017, DHS recorded 7,108 enforcement actions with non-Mexican aliens along the southern border—which accounted for roughly 36 percent of all enforcement actions along the southern border that month. In May of FY 2018, DHS recorded 32,477 enforcement actions with non-Mexican aliens along the southern border—which accounted for roughly 63 percent of that month's enforcement actions along the southern border. And in May of FY 2019, DHS recorded 121,151 enforcement actions with non-Mexican aliens along the southern border—which accounted for approximately 84 percent of enforcement actions along the southern border that month. Accordingly, the number of enforcement actions involving non-Mexican aliens increased by more than 1,600 percent from May FY 2017 to May FY 2019, and

the percentage of enforcement actions at the southern land border involving non-Mexican aliens increased from 36 percent to 84 percent. Overall, southern border non-Mexican enforcement actions in FY 2017 totaled 233,411; they increased to 298,503 in FY 2018; and, in the first eight months of FY 2019 (through May) they already total 524,446.

This increase corresponds to a growing trend over the past decade, in which the overall percentage of all aliens subject to expedited removal who are referred for a credible-fear interview by DHS jumped from approximately 5 percent to above 40 percent. The total number of aliens referred by DHS for credible-fear screening increased from fewer than 5,000 in FY 2008 to more than 99,000 in FY 2018. The percentage of aliens who receive asylum remains small. In FY 2018, DHS asylum officers found over 75 percent of interviewed aliens to have a credible fear of persecution or torture and referred them for proceedings before an immigration judge within EOIR under section 240 of the INA. In addition, EOIR immigration judges overturn about 20 percent of the negative credible-fear determinations made by asylum officers, finding those aliens also to have a credible fear. Such aliens are referred to immigration judges for full hearings on their asylum claims.

But many aliens who receive a positive credible-fear determination never file an application for asylum. From FY 2016 through FY 2018, approximately 40 percent of aliens who received a positive credible-fear determination failed to file an asylum application. And of those who did proceed to file asylum applications, relatively few established that they should be granted such relief. From FY 2016 through FY 2018, among aliens who received a positive credible-fear determination, only 12,062 aliens⁴—an average of 4,021 per year—were granted asylum (14 percent of all completed asylum cases, and about 36 percent of asylum cases decided

⁴ These numbers are based on data generated by EOIR on April 12, 2019.

on the merits).⁵ The many cases that lack merit occupy a large portion of limited docket time and absorb scarce government resources, exacerbating the backlog and diverting attention from other meritorious cases. Indeed, despite DOJ deploying the largest number of immigration judges in history and completing historic numbers of cases, a significant backlog remains. There are more than 900,000 pending cases in immigration courts, at least 436,000 of which include an asylum application.

Apprehending and processing this growing number of aliens who cross illegally into the United States and invoke asylum procedures consumes an ever-increasing amount of resources of DHS, which must surveil, apprehend, screen, and process the aliens who enter the country and must represent the U.S. Government in cases before immigration judges, the Board, and the U.S. Courts of Appeals. The interim rule seeks to ameliorate these strains on the immigration system.

The rule also aims to further the humanitarian purposes of asylum by prioritizing individuals who are unable to obtain protection from persecution elsewhere and individuals who have been victims of a “severe form of trafficking in persons” as defined by 8 CFR 214.11,⁶ many of whom do not volitionally transit through a third country to reach the United States.⁷ By

⁵ Completed cases include both those in which an asylum application was filed and those in which an application was not filed. Cases decided on the merits include only those completed cases in which an asylum application was filed and the immigration judge granted or denied that application.

⁶ “Severe form of trafficking in persons means sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is under the age of 18 years; or the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” 8 CFR 214.11. Determinations made with respect to this exception will not be binding on Federal departments or agencies in subsequent determinations of eligibility for T or U nonimmigrant status under section 101(a)(15)(T) or (U) of the Act or for benefits or services under 22 U.S.C. 7105 or 8 U.S.C. 1641(c)(4).

⁷ This rule does not provide for a categorical exception for unaccompanied alien children (“UAC”), as defined in 6 U.S.C. 279(g)(2). The Departments recognize that UAC are exempt from two of three statutory bars to applying for asylum: the “safe third country” bar and the one-year filing deadline, *see* INA 208(a)(2)(E), 8 U.S.C. 1158(a)(2)(E). Congress, however, did not exempt UAC from the bar on filing successive applications for asylum, *see* INA 208(a)(2)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(a)(2)(C), the various bars to asylum eligibility in INA 208(b)(2)(A), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(A), or the bars, like this one, established pursuant to the Departments’ authorities under INA

detering meritless asylum claims and de-prioritizing the applications of individuals who could have sought protection in another country before reaching the United States, the Departments seek to ensure that those asylees who need relief most urgently are better able to obtain it.

The interim rule would further this objective by restricting the claims of aliens who, while ostensibly fleeing persecution, chose not to seek protection at the earliest possible opportunity. An alien's decision not to apply for protection at the first available opportunity, and instead wait for the more preferred destination of the United States, raises questions about the validity and urgency of the alien's claim and may mean that the claim is less likely to be successful.⁸ By barring such claims, the interim final rule would encourage those fleeing genuine persecution to seek protection as soon as possible and dissuade those with non-viable claims, including aliens merely seeking employment, from further overburdening the Nation's immigration system.

Many of the aliens who wait to seek asylum until they arrive in the United States transit through not just one country, but multiple countries in which they may seek humanitarian protection. Yet they do not avail themselves of that option despite their claims of fear of

208(b)(2)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C). But UAC, like others subject to this rule, will be able to apply for withholding of removal under INA section 241(b)(3), 8 U.S.C. 1231(b)(3), or the CAT regulations. UAC will not be returned to the transit country for consideration of these protection claims.

⁸ Indeed, the Board has previously held that this is a relevant consideration in asylum applications. In *Matter of Pula*, 19 I&N Dec. 467, 473–74 (BIA 1987), the Board stated that “in determining whether a favorable exercise of discretion is warranted” for an applicant under the asylum statute, INA 208(a), 8 U.S.C. 1158(2)(a), “[a]mong those factors which should be considered are whether the alien passed through any other countries or arrived in the United States directly from his country, whether orderly refugee procedures were in fact available to help him in any country he passed through, and whether he made any attempts to seek asylum before coming to the United States.” Consistent with the reasoning in *Pula*, this rule establishes that an alien who failed to request asylum in a country where it was available is not eligible for asylum in the United States. Even though the Board in *Pula* indicated that a range of factors is relevant to evaluating discretionary asylum relief under the general *statutory* asylum provision, the INA also authorizes the establishment of additional limitations to asylum eligibility by *regulation*—beyond those embedded in the statute. See INA 208(b)(2)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(2)(C). This rule uses that authority to establish one of the factors specified as relevant in *Pula* as the foundation of a new categorical asylum bar. This rule's prioritization of the third-country-transit factor, considered as just one of many factors in *Pula*, is justified, as explained above, by the increased numbers and changed nature of asylum claims in recent years.

persecution or torture in their home country. Under these circumstances, it is reasonable to question whether the aliens genuinely fear persecution or torture, or are simply economic migrants seeking to exploit our overburdened immigration system by filing a meritless asylum claim as a way of entering, remaining, and legally obtaining employment in the United States.⁹

All seven countries in Central America plus Mexico are parties to both the Refugee Convention and the Refugee Protocol. Moreover, Mexico has expanded its capacity to adjudicate asylum claims in recent years, and the number of claims submitted in Mexico has increased. In 2016, the Mexican government received 8,789 asylum applications. In 2017, it received 14,596. In 2018, it received 29,623 applications. And in just the first three months of 2019, Mexico received 12,716 asylum applications, putting Mexico on track to receive more than 50,000 asylum applications by the end of 2019 if that quarterly pace continues. Instead of availing themselves of these available protections, many aliens transiting through Central America and Mexico decide not to seek protection, likely based upon a preference for residing in the United States. The United States has experienced an overwhelming surge in the number of non-Mexican aliens crossing the southern border and seeking asylum. This overwhelming surge and its accompanying burden on the United States has eroded the integrity of our borders, and it is inconsistent with the national interest to provide a discretionary benefit to those who choose not to seek protection at the first available opportunity.

The interim final rule also is in keeping with the efforts of other liberal democracies to prevent forum-shopping by directing asylum-seekers to present their claims in the first safe

⁹ Economic migrants are not eligible for asylum. *See, e.g., In re: Brenda Leticia Sondag-Chavez*, No. A-7-969, 2017 WL 4946947, at *1 (BIA Sept. 7, 2017) (“[E]conomic reasons for coming to the United States . . . would generally not render an alien eligible for relief from removal.”); *see also Sale v. Haitian Centers Council Inc.*, 509 U.S. 155, 161–62 & n.11 (1993); *Hui Zhuang v. Gonzales*, 471 F.3d 884, 890 (8th Cir. 2006) (“Fears of economic hardship or lack of opportunity do not establish a well-founded fear of persecution.”).

country in which they arrive. In 1990, European states adopted the Dublin Regulation in response to an asylum crisis as refugees and economic migrants fled communism at the end of the Cold War; it came into force in 1997. *See* Convention Determining the State Responsible for Examining Applications for Asylum Lodged in One of the Member States of the European Communities, 1997 O.J. (C 254). The United Nations High Commission for Refugees praised the Dublin Regulation’s “commendable efforts to share and allocate the burden of review of refugee and asylum claims.” *See* UN High Comm’r for Refugees, *UNHCR Position on Conventions Recently Concluded in Europe (Dublin and Schengen Conventions)*, 3 Eur. Series 2, 385 (1991). Now in its third iteration, the Dublin III Regulation sets asylum criteria and protocol for the European Union (“EU”). It instructs that asylum claims “shall be examined by a single Member State.” Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013, Establishing the Criteria and Mechanisms for Determining the Member State Responsible for Examining an Application for International Protection Lodged in One of the Member States by a Third-Country National or a Stateless Person (Recast), 2013 O.J. (L 180) 31, 37. Typically, for irregular migrants seeking asylum, the member state by which the asylum applicant first entered the EU “shall be responsible for examining the application for international protection.” *Id.* at 40. Generally, when a third-country national seeks asylum in a member state other than the state of first entry into the EU, that state may transfer the asylum-seeker back to the state of first safe entry. *Id.* at 2.

This rule also seeks to curtail the humanitarian crisis created by human smugglers bringing men, women, and children across the southern border. By reducing a central incentive for aliens without a genuine need for asylum to cross the border—the hope of a lengthy asylum

process that will enable them to remain in the United States for years despite their statutory ineligibility for relief—the rule aims to reduce human smuggling and its tragic effects.

Finally, as discussed further below, this rule will facilitate ongoing diplomatic negotiations with Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries regarding general migration issues, related measures employed to control the flow of aliens (such as the Migrant Protection Protocols), and the humanitarian and security crisis along the southern land border between the United States and Mexico.

In sum, the rule would bar asylum for any alien who has entered or attempted to enter the United States across the southern border and who has failed to apply for protection from persecution or torture in at least one country outside the alien’s country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence through which the alien transited en route to the United States, unless the alien demonstrates that the alien only transited through countries that were not parties to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the CAT, or the alien was a victim of “a severe form of trafficking in persons” as defined by 8 CFR 214.11.

Such a rule would ensure that the ever-growing influx of meritless asylum claims do not further overwhelm the country’s immigration system, would promote the humanitarian purposes of asylum by speeding relief to those who need it most (i.e., individuals who have no alternative country where they can escape persecution or torture or who are victims of a severe form of trafficking and thus did not volitionally travel through a third country to reach the United States), would help curtail the humanitarian crisis created by human smugglers, and would aid U.S. negotiations on migration issues with foreign countries.

V. Regulatory Requirements

A. Administrative Procedure Act

1. Good Cause Exception

While the Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”) generally requires agencies to publish notice of a proposed rulemaking in the **Federal Register** for a period of public comment, it provides an exception “when the agency for good cause finds . . . that notice and public procedure thereon are impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest.” 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B). That exception relieves agencies of the notice-and-comment requirement in emergency situations, or in circumstances where “the delay created by the notice and comment requirements would result in serious damage to important interests.” *Woods Psychiatric Inst. v. United States*, 20 Cl. Ct. 324, 333 (1990), *aff’d*, 925 F.2d 1454 (Fed. Cir. 1991); *see also United States v. Dean*, 604 F.3d 1275, 1279 (11th Cir. 2010); *Nat’l Fed’n of Federal Emps. v. Nat’l Treasury Emps. Union*, 671 F.2d 607, 611 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Agencies have previously relied on that exception in promulgating immigration-related interim rules.¹⁰ Furthermore, DHS has relied on that exception as additional legal justification when issuing orders related to expedited removal—a context in which Congress explicitly recognized the need for dispatch in addressing large volumes of aliens by giving the Secretary significant discretion to “modify at any time” the

¹⁰ *See, e.g.*, Visas: Documentation of Nonimmigrants Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, as Amended, 81 FR 5906, 5907 (Feb. 4, 2016) (interim rule citing good cause to immediately require additional documentation from certain Caribbean agricultural workers to avoid “an increase in applications for admission in bad faith by persons who would otherwise have been denied visas and are seeking to avoid the visa requirement and consular screening process during the period between the publication of a proposed and a final rule”); Suspending the 30-Day and Annual Interview Requirements From the Special Registration Process for Certain Nonimmigrants, 68 FR 67578, 67581 (Dec. 2, 2003) (interim rule claiming the good cause exception for suspending certain automatic registration requirements for nonimmigrants because “without [the] regulation approximately 82,532 aliens would be subject to 30-day or annual re-registration interviews” over a six-month period).

classes of aliens who would be subject to such procedures. *See* INA 235(b)(1)(A)(iii)(I), 8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(A)(iii)(I).¹¹

The Departments have concluded that the good cause exceptions in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and (d)(3) apply to this rule. Notice and comment on this rule, along with a 30-day delay in its effective date, would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The Departments have determined that immediate implementation of this rule is essential to avoid a surge of aliens who would have strong incentives to seek to cross the border during pre-promulgation notice and comment or during the 30-day delay in the effective date under 5 U.S.C. 553(d). As courts have recognized, smugglers encourage migrants to enter the United States based on changes in U.S. immigration policy, and in fact “the number of asylum seekers entering as families has risen” in a way that “suggests a link to knowledge of those policies.” *East Bay Sanctuary Covenant v. Trump*, 354 F. Supp. 3d 1094, 1115 (N.D. Cal. 2018). If this rule were published for notice and comment before becoming effective, “smugglers might similarly communicate the Rule’s potentially relevant change in U.S. immigration policy, albeit in non-technical terms,” and the risk of a surge in migrants hoping to enter the country before the rule becomes effective supports a finding of good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553. *See id.*

This determination is consistent with the historical view of the agencies regulating in this area. DHS concluded in January 2017 that it was imperative to give immediate effect to a rule

¹¹ *See, e.g.,* Eliminating Exception to Expedited Removal Authority for Cuban Nationals Arriving by Air, 82 FR 4769, 4770 (Jan. 17, 2017) (identifying the APA good cause factors as additional justification for issuing an immediately effective expedited removal order because the ability to detain certain Cuban nationals “while admissibility and identity are determined and protection claims are adjudicated, as well as to quickly remove those without protection claims or claims to lawful status, is a necessity for national security and public safety”); Designating Aliens For Expedited Removal, 69 FR 48877, 48880 (Aug. 11, 2004) (identifying the APA good cause factors as additional justification for issuing an immediately effective order to expand expedited removal due to “[t]he large volume of illegal entries, and attempted illegal entries, and the attendant risks to national security presented by these illegal entries,” as well as “the need to deter foreign nationals from undertaking dangerous border crossings, and thereby prevent the needless deaths and crimes associated with human trafficking and alien smuggling operations”).

designating Cuban nationals arriving by air as eligible for expedited removal because “pre-promulgation notice and comment would . . . endanger[] human life and hav[e] a potential destabilizing effect in the region.” Eliminating Exception to Expedited Removal Authority for Cuban Nationals Arriving by Air, 82 FR 4769, 4770 (Jan. 17, 2017). DHS cited the prospect that “publication of the rule as a proposed rule, which would signal a significant change in policy while permitting continuation of the exception for Cuban nationals, could lead to a surge in migration of Cuban nationals seeking to travel to and enter the United States during the period between the publication of a proposed and a final rule.” *Id.* DHS found that “[s]uch a surge would threaten national security and public safety by diverting valuable Government resources from counterterrorism and homeland security responsibilities. A surge could also have a destabilizing effect on the region, thus weakening the security of the United States and threatening its international relations.” *Id.* DHS concluded that “a surge could result in significant loss of human life.” *Id.*; accord, e.g., Designating Aliens for Expedited Removal, 69 FR 48877 (Aug. 11, 2004) (noting similar destabilizing incentives for a surge during a delay in the effective date); Visas: Documentation of Nonimmigrants Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, as Amended, 81 FR 5906, 5907 (Feb. 4, 2016) (finding the good cause exception applicable because of similar short-run incentive concerns).

DOJ and DHS raised similar concerns and drew similar conclusions in the November 2018 joint interim final rule that limited eligibility for asylum for aliens, subject to a bar on entry under certain presidential proclamations. *See* 83 FR at 55950. These same concerns would apply to an even greater extent to this rule. Pre-promulgation notice and comment, or a delay in the effective date, would be destabilizing and would jeopardize the lives and welfare of aliens who could surge to the border to enter the United States before the rule took effect. The

Departments' experience has been that when public announcements are made regarding changes in our immigration laws and procedures, there are dramatic increases in the numbers of aliens who enter or attempt to enter the United States along the southern border. See *East Bay Sanctuary Covenant*, 354 F. Supp. 3d at 1115 (citing a newspaper article suggesting that such a rush to the border occurred due to knowledge of a pending regulatory change in immigration law). Thus, there continues to be an "urgent need to deter foreign nationals from undertaking dangerous border crossings, and thereby prevent the needless deaths and crimes associated with human trafficking and alien smuggling operations." 69 FR at 48878.

Furthermore, an additional surge of aliens who sought to enter via the southern border prior to the effective date of this rule would be destabilizing to the region, as well as to the U.S. immigration system. The massive increase in aliens arriving at the southern border who assert a fear of persecution is overwhelming our immigration system as a result of a variety of factors, including the significant proportion of aliens who are initially found to have a credible fear and therefore are referred to full hearings on their asylum claims; the huge volume of claims; a lack of detention space; and the resulting high rate of release into the interior of the United States of aliens with a positive credible-fear determination, many of whom then abscond without pursuing their asylum claims. Recent initiatives to track family unit cases revealed that close to 82 percent of completed cases have resulted in an *in absentia* order of removal. A large additional influx of aliens who intend to enter unlawfully or who lack proper documentation to enter this country, all at once, would exacerbate the existing border crisis. This concern is particularly acute in the current climate in which illegal immigration flows fluctuate significantly in response to news events. This interim final rule is thus a practical means to address the time-sensitive

influx of aliens and avoid creating an even larger short-term influx. An extended notice-and-comment rulemaking process would be impracticable and self-defeating for the public.

2. Foreign Affairs Exemption

Alternatively, the Departments may forgo notice-and-comment procedures and a delay in the effective date because this rule involves a “foreign affairs function of the United States.” 5 U.S.C. 553(a)(1), and proceeding through notice and comment may “provoke definitely undesirable international consequences,” *City of New York v. Permanent Mission of India to United Nations*, 618 F.3d 172, 201 (2d Cir. 2010) (quoting the description of the purpose of the foreign affairs exception in H.R. Rep. No. 79-1980, 69th Cong., 2d Sess. 257 (1946)). The flow of aliens across the southern border, unlawfully or without appropriate travel documents, directly implicates the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States. *See, e.g.*, Exec. Order 13767 (Jan. 25, 2017) (discussing the important national security and foreign affairs-related interests associated with securing the border); Presidential Memorandum on Additional Measures to Enhance Border Security and Restore Integrity to Our Immigration System (Apr. 29, 2019) (“This strategic exploitation of our Nation’s humanitarian programs undermines our Nation’s security and sovereignty.”); *see also, e.g., Malek-Marzban v. INS*, 653 F.2d 113, 115–16 (4th Cir. 1981) (finding that a regulation requiring the expedited departure of Iranians from the United States in light of the international hostage crisis clearly related to foreign affairs and fell within the notice-and-comment exception).

This rule will facilitate ongoing diplomatic negotiations with foreign countries regarding migration issues, including measures to control the flow of aliens into the United States (such as the Migrant Protection Protocols), and the urgent need to address the current humanitarian and security crisis along the southern land border between the United States and Mexico. *See City of*

New York, 618 F.3d at 201 (finding that rules related to diplomacy with a potential impact on U.S. relations with other countries fall within the scope of the foreign affairs exemption). Those ongoing discussions relate to proposals for how these other countries could increase efforts to help reduce the flow of illegal aliens north to the United States and encourage aliens to seek protection at the safest and earliest point of transit possible.

Those negotiations would be disrupted if notice-and-comment procedures preceded the effective date of this rule—provoking a disturbance in domestic politics in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries, and eroding the sovereign authority of the United States to pursue the negotiating strategy it deems to be most appropriate as it engages its foreign partners. *See, e.g., Am. Ass’n of Exps. & Imps.-Textile & Apparel Grp. v. United States*, 751 F.2d 1239, 1249 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (the foreign affairs exemption facilitates “more cautious and sensitive consideration of those matters which so affect relations with other Governments that . . . public rulemaking provisions would provoke definitely undesirable international consequences” (internal quotation marks omitted)). During a notice-and-comment process, public participation and comments may impact and potentially harm the goodwill between the United States and Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries—actors with whom the United States must partner to ensure that refugees can more effectively find refuge and safety in third countries. *Cf. Rajah v. Mukasey*, 544 F.3d 427, 437–38 (2d Cir. 2008) (“[R]elations with other countries might be impaired if the government were to conduct and resolve a public debate over why some citizens of particular countries were a potential danger to our security.”).

In addition, the longer that the effective date of the interim rule is delayed, the greater the number of people who will pass through third countries where they may have otherwise received refuge and reach the U.S. border, which has little present capacity to provide assistance. *Cf. East*

Bay Sanctuary Covenant v. Trump, 909 F.3d 1219, 1252 (9th Cir. 2018) (“Hindering the President’s ability to implement a new policy in response to a current foreign affairs crisis is the type of ‘definitely undesirable international consequence’ that warrants invocation of the foreign affairs exception.”). Addressing this crisis will be more effective and less disruptive to long-term U.S. relations with Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries the sooner that this interim final rule is in place to help address the enormous flow of aliens through these countries to the southern U.S. border. *Cf. Am. Ass’n of Exps. & Imps.-Textile & Apparel Grp.*, 751 F.2d at 1249 (“The timing of an announcement of new consultations or quotas may be linked intimately with the Government’s overall political agenda concerning relations with another country.”); *Rajah*, 544 F.3d at 438 (finding that the notice-and-comment process can be “slow and cumbersome,” which can negatively impact efforts to secure U.S. national interests, thereby justifying application of the foreign affairs exemption); *East Bay Sanctuary Covenant*, 909 F.3d at 1252–53 (9th Cir. 2018) (suggesting that reliance on the exemption is justified where the Government “explain[s] how immediate *publication* of the Rule, instead of *announcement* of a proposed rule followed by a thirty-day period of notice and comment” is necessary in light of the Government’s foreign affairs efforts).

The United States and Mexico have been engaged in ongoing discussions regarding both regional and bilateral approaches to asylum. This interim final rule will strengthen the ability of the United States to address the crisis at the southern border and therefore facilitate the likelihood of success in future negotiations. This rule thus supports the President’s foreign policy with respect to Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries in this area and is exempt from the notice-and-comment and delayed-effective-date requirements in 5 U.S.C. 553. *See Am. Ass’n of Exps. & Imps.-Textile & Apparel Grp.*, 751 F.2d at 1249 (noting that the foreign affairs

exception covers agency actions “linked intimately with the Government’s overall political agenda concerning relations with another country”); *Yassini v. Crosland*, 618 F.2d 1356, 1361 (9th Cir. 1980) (because an immigration directive “was implementing the President’s foreign policy,” the action “fell within the foreign affairs function and good cause exceptions to the notice and comment requirements of the APA”).

Invoking the APA’s foreign affairs exception is also consistent with past rulemakings. In 2016, for example, in response to diplomatic developments between the United States and Cuba, DHS changed its regulations concerning flights to and from the island via an immediately effective interim final rule. *Flights to and From Cuba*, 81 FR 14948, 14952 (Mar. 21, 2016). In a similar vein, DHS and the State Department recently provided notice that they were eliminating an exception to expedited removal for certain Cuban nationals. The notice explained that the change in policy was consistent with the foreign affairs exception for rules subject to notice-and-comment requirements because the change was central to ongoing negotiations between the two countries. *Eliminating Exception To Expedited Removal Authority for Cuban Nationals Encountered in the United States or Arriving by Sea*, 82 FR 4902, 4904–05 (Jan. 17, 2017).

B. Regulatory Flexibility Act

The Regulatory Flexibility Act, 5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*, as amended by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996, requires an agency to prepare and make available to the public a regulatory flexibility analysis that describes the effect of the rule on small entities (i.e., small businesses, small organizations, and small governmental jurisdictions). A regulatory flexibility analysis is not required when a rule is exempt from notice-and-comment rulemaking.

C. Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995

This interim final rule will not result in the expenditure by state, local, and tribal governments, in the aggregate, or by the private sector, of \$100 million or more in any one year, and it will not significantly or uniquely affect small governments. Therefore, no actions were deemed necessary under the provisions of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995.

D. Congressional Review Act

This interim final rule is not a major rule as defined by section 804 of the Congressional Review Act, 5 U.S.C. 804. This rule will not result in an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more; a major increase in costs or prices; or significant adverse effects on competition, employment, investment, productivity, innovation, or on the ability of United States-based companies to compete with foreign-based companies in domestic and export markets.

E. Executive Order 12866, Executive Order 13563, and Executive Order 13771 (Regulatory Planning and Review)

This rule is not subject to Executive Order 12866 as it implicates a foreign affairs function of the United States related to ongoing discussions with potential impact on a set of specified international relationships. As this is not a regulatory action under Executive Order 12866, it is not subject to Executive Order 13771.

F. Executive Order 13132 (Federalism)

This rule will not have substantial direct effects on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government. Therefore, in accordance with section 6 of Executive Order 13132, it is determined that this rule does not have sufficient federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a federalism summary impact statement.

G. Executive Order 12988 (Civil Justice Reform)

This rule meets the applicable standards set forth in sections 3(a) and 3(b)(2) of Executive Order 12988.

H. Paperwork Reduction Act

This rule does not propose new, or revisions to existing, “collection[s] of information” as that term is defined under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104–13, 44 U.S.C. chapter 35, and its implementing regulations, 5 CFR part 1320.

List of Subjects

8 CFR Part 208

Administrative practice and procedure, Aliens, Immigration, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

8 CFR Part 1003

Administrative practice and procedure, Aliens, Immigration, Legal services, Organization and functions (Government agencies).

8 CFR Part 1208

Administrative practice and procedure, Aliens, Immigration, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Regulatory Amendments

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Accordingly, for the reasons set forth in the preamble, the Secretary of Homeland Security amends 8 CFR part 208 as follows:

PART 208 – PROCEDURES FOR ASYLUM AND WITHHOLDING OF REMOVAL

1. The authority citation for part 208 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 8 U.S.C. 1101, 1103, 1158, 1226, 1252, 1282; Title VII of Public Law 110-229; 8 CFR part 2.

2. Section 208.13 is amended by adding paragraphs (c)(4) and (5) to read as follows:

§ 208.13 Establishing asylum eligibility.

* * * * *

(c) * * *

(4) *Additional limitation on eligibility for asylum.* Notwithstanding the provisions of § 208.15, any alien who enters, attempts to enter, or arrives in the United States across the southern land border on or after [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*], after transiting through at least one country outside the alien’s country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence en route to the United States, shall be found ineligible for asylum unless:

(i) The alien demonstrates that he or she applied for protection from persecution or torture in at least one country outside the alien’s country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence through which the alien transited en route to the United States, and the alien received a final judgment denying the alien protection in such country;

(ii) The alien demonstrates that he or she satisfies the definition of “victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons” provided in 8 CFR 214.11; or

(iii) The only countries through which the alien transited en route to the United States were, at the time of the transit, not parties to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

(5) *Non-binding determinations.* Determinations made with respect to paragraph (c)(4)(ii) of this section are not binding on Federal departments or agencies in subsequent

determinations of eligibility for T or U nonimmigrant status under section 101(a)(15)(T) or (U) of the INA or for benefits or services under 22 U.S.C. 7105 or 8 U.S.C. 1641(c)(4).

3. In § 208.30, revise the section heading, the first sentence of paragraph (e)(2), and paragraphs (e)(3) and (5) to read as follows:

§ 208.30 Credible fear determinations involving stowaways and applicants for admission who are found inadmissible pursuant to section 212(a)(6)(C) or 212(a)(7) of the Act, whose entry is limited or suspended under section 212(f) or 215(a)(1) of the Act, or who failed to apply for protection from persecution in a third country where potential relief is available while en route to the United States.

* * * * *

(e) * * *

(2) Subject to paragraph (e)(5) of this section, an alien will be found to have a credible fear of persecution if there is a significant possibility, taking into account the credibility of the statements made by the alien in support of the alien's claim and such other facts as are known to the officer, the alien can establish eligibility for asylum under section 208 of the Act or for withholding of removal under section 241(b)(3) of the Act. * * *

(3) Subject to paragraph (e)(5) of this section, an alien will be found to have a credible fear of torture if the alien shows that there is a significant possibility that he or she is eligible for withholding of removal or deferral of removal under the Convention Against Torture, pursuant to § 208.16 or § 208.17.

* * * * *

(5)(i) Except as provided in this paragraph (e)(5)(i) or paragraph (e)(6) of this section, if an alien is able to establish a credible fear of persecution but appears to be subject to one or more

of the mandatory bars to applying for, or being granted, asylum contained in section 208(a)(2) and 208(b)(2) of the Act, or to withholding of removal contained in section 241(b)(3)(B) of the Act, the Department of Homeland Security shall nonetheless place the alien in proceedings under section 240 of the Act for full consideration of the alien's claim, if the alien is not a stowaway. If the alien is a stowaway, the Department shall place the alien in proceedings for consideration of the alien's claim pursuant to § 208.2(c)(3).

(ii) If the alien is found to be an alien described in § 208.13(c)(3), then the asylum officer shall enter a negative credible fear determination with respect to the alien's intention to apply for asylum. The Department shall nonetheless place the alien in proceedings under section 240 of the Act for full consideration of the alien's claim for withholding of removal under section 241(b)(3) of the Act, or for withholding or deferral of removal under the Convention Against Torture, if the alien establishes, respectively, a reasonable fear of persecution or torture. However, if an alien fails to establish, during the interview with the asylum officer, a reasonable fear of either persecution or torture, the asylum officer will provide the alien with a written notice of decision, which will be subject to immigration judge review consistent with paragraph (g) of this section, except that the immigration judge will review the reasonable fear findings under the reasonable fear standard instead of the credible fear standard described in paragraph (g) and in 8 CFR 1208.30(g).

(iii) If the alien is found to be an alien described as ineligible for asylum in § 208.13(c)(4), then the asylum officer shall enter a negative credible fear determination with respect to the alien's application for asylum. The Department shall nonetheless place the alien in proceedings under section 240 of the Act for consideration of the alien's claim for withholding of removal under section 241(b)(3) of the Act, or for withholding or deferral of removal under

the Convention Against Torture, if the alien establishes, respectively, a reasonable fear of persecution or torture. The scope of review shall be limited to a determination of whether the alien is eligible for withholding or deferral of removal, accordingly. However, if an alien fails to establish, during the interview with the asylum officer, a reasonable fear of either persecution or torture, the asylum officer will provide the alien with a written notice of decision, which will be subject to immigration judge review consistent with paragraph (g) of this section, except that the immigration judge will review the reasonable fear findings under the reasonable fear standard instead of the credible fear standard described in paragraph (g) and in 8 CFR 1208.30(g).

* * * * *

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Accordingly, for the reasons set forth in the preamble, the Attorney General amends 8 CFR parts 1003 and 1208 as follows:

PART 1003—EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW

4. The authority citation for part 1003 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 301; 6 U.S.C 521; 8 U.S.C. 1101, 1103, 1154, 1155, 1158, 1182, 1226, 1229, 1229a, 1229b, 1229c, 1231, 1254a, 1255, 1324d, 1330, 1361, 1362; 28 U.S.C. 509, 510, 1746; sec. 2 Reorg. Plan No. 2 of 1950; 3 CFR, 1949-1953 Comp., p. 1002; section 203 of Pub. L. 105–100, 111 Stat. 2196–200; sections 1506 and 1510 of Pub. L. 106–386, 114 Stat. 1527–29, 1531–32; section 1505 of Pub. L. 106–554, 114 Stat. 2763A–326 to –328.

5. In § 1003.42, revise paragraph (d) to read as follows:

§ 1003.42 Review of credible fear determination.

* * * * *

(d) *Standard of review.* (1) The immigration judge shall make a de novo determination as to whether there is a significant possibility, taking into account the credibility of the statements made by the alien in support of the alien's claim and such other facts as are known to the

immigration judge, that the alien could establish eligibility for asylum under section 208 of the Act or withholding under section 241(b)(3) of the Act or withholding or deferral of removal under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

(2) If the alien is determined to be an alien described in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(3) or 1208.13(c)(3) and is determined to lack a reasonable fear under 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5)(ii), the immigration judge shall first review de novo the determination that the alien is described in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(3) or 1208.13(c)(3) prior to any further review of the asylum officer's negative determination.

(3) If the alien is determined to be an alien described as ineligible for asylum in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(4) or 1208.13(c)(4) and is determined to lack a reasonable fear under 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5)(iii), the immigration judge shall first review de novo the determination that the alien is described as ineligible for asylum in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(4) or 1208.13(c)(4) prior to any further review of the asylum officer's negative determination.

* * * * *

PART 1208 – PROCEDURES FOR ASYLUM AND WITHHOLDING OF REMOVAL

6. The authority citation for part 1208 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 8 U.S.C. 1101, 1103, 1158, 1226, 1252, 1282; Title VII of Public Law 110-229.

7. In § 1208.13, add paragraphs (c)(4) and (5) to read as follows:

§ 1208.13 Establishing asylum eligibility.

* * * * *

(c) * * *

(4) *Additional limitation on eligibility for asylum.* Notwithstanding the provisions of 8 CFR 208.15, any alien who enters, attempts to enter, or arrives in the United States across the southern land border on or after [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*], after transiting through at least one country outside the alien's country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence en route to the United States, shall be found ineligible for asylum unless:

(i) The alien demonstrates that he or she applied for protection from persecution or torture in at least one country outside the alien's country of citizenship, nationality, or last lawful habitual residence through which the alien transited en route to the United States and the alien received a final judgment denying the alien protection in such country;

(ii) The alien demonstrates that he or she satisfies the definition of "victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons" provided in 8 CFR 214.11; or

(iii) The only country or countries through which the alien transited en route to the United States were, at the time of the transit, not parties to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol, or the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

(5) *Non-binding determinations.* Determinations made with respect to paragraph (c)(4)(ii) of this section are not binding on Federal departments or agencies in subsequent determinations of eligibility for T or U nonimmigrant status under section 101(a)(15)(T) or (U) of the Act or for benefits or services under 22 U.S.C. 7105 or 8 U.S.C. 1641(c)(4).

8. In § 1208.30, revise the section heading and paragraph (g)(1) to read as follows:

§ 1208.30 Credible fear determinations involving stowaways and applicants for admission who are found inadmissible pursuant to section 212(a)(6)(C) or 212(a)(7) of the Act, whose

entry is limited or suspended under section 212(f) or 215(a)(1) of the Act, or who failed to apply for protection from persecution in a third country where potential relief is available while en route to the United States.

* * * * *

(g) * * *

(1) *Review by immigration judge of a mandatory bar finding.* (i) If the alien is determined to be an alien described in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(3) or 1208.13(c)(3) and is determined to lack a reasonable fear under 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5), the immigration judge shall first review de novo the determination that the alien is described in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(3) or 1208.13(c)(3). If the immigration judge finds that the alien is not described in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(3) or 1208.13(c)(3), then the immigration judge shall vacate the order of the asylum officer, and DHS may commence removal proceedings under section 240 of the Act. If the immigration judge concurs with the credible fear determination that the alien is an alien described in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(3) or 1208.13(c)(3), the immigration judge will then review the asylum officer's negative decision regarding reasonable fear made under 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5) consistent with paragraph (g)(2) of this section, except that the immigration judge will review the findings under the reasonable fear standard instead of the credible fear standard described in paragraph (g)(2).

(ii) If the alien is determined to be an alien described as ineligible for asylum in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(4) or 1208.13(c)(4) and is determined to lack a reasonable fear under 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5), the immigration judge shall first review de novo the determination that the alien is described as ineligible for asylum in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(4) or 1208.13(c)(4). If the immigration judge finds that the alien is not described as ineligible for asylum in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(4) or 1208.13(c)(4), then the immigration judge shall vacate the order of the asylum officer, and DHS

may commence removal proceedings under section 240 of the Act. If the immigration judge concurs with the credible fear determination that the alien is an alien described as ineligible for asylum in 8 CFR 208.13(c)(4) or 1208.13(c)(4), the immigration judge will then review the asylum officer's negative decision regarding reasonable fear made under 8 CFR 208.30(e)(5) consistent with paragraph (g)(2) of this section, except that the immigration judge will review the findings under the reasonable fear standard instead of the credible fear standard described in paragraph (g)(2).

* * * * *

Approved:

Dated: July 12, 2019.

Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security

Approved:

Dated: July 12, 2019.

William P. Barr
Attorney General

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