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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

CRISTIAN DOE; DIANA DOE,  
Petitioners-Plaintiffs,  
v.  
KEVIN K. McALEENAN, Acting  
Secretary of the Department of Homeland  
Security; et al.,  
Respondents-Defendants.

Case No.: 3:19-cv-2119-DMS-AGS

**ORDER GRANTING MOTION FOR  
TEMPORARY RESTRAINING  
ORDER**

This matter comes before the Court on Petitioners’ motion for temporary restraining order (“TRO”) to allow Petitioners access to their retained counsel prior to and during Petitioners’ *non-refoulement* interviews under the Government’s recently implemented Migrant Protection Protocols Program (“MPP” or “Remain in Mexico”). Under the MPP, asylum seekers like Petitioners who enter or seek admission to the United States by land from Mexico may be returned to Mexico where they must await the outcome of their immigration proceedings. An exception to the MPP exists where an asylum seeker can show he or she faces persecution or torture in Mexico, a showing they attempt to make during their *non-refoulement* interview. If successful, the individual is taken out of MPP and paroled or detained in the United States for the duration of their removal proceedings.

1 Petitioners await their *non-refoulement* interview but allege Respondents are  
2 wrongfully denying them their right of access to retained counsel, both prior to and during  
3 their interview, in violation of their statutory rights under the Administrative Procedure  
4 Act (“APA”) and their rights under the First and Fifth Amendments to the United States  
5 Constitution. Respondents have agreed not to conduct Petitioners’ *non-refoulement*  
6 interviews pending the Court’s determination of the present motion. Respondents argue  
7 the Court should deny the motion as the Court lacks jurisdiction to hear the matter, and in  
8 any event, there is no right of access to retained counsel prior to or during a non-  
9 *refoulement* interview.

10 The matter has been fully briefed and argued. For the reasons set forth below, the  
11 Court concludes Petitioners have met their burden and are entitled to a TRO allowing them  
12 access to their retained counsel before and during their *non-refoulement* interviews. The  
13 APA, specifically 5 U.S.C. § 555(b), provides a right of access to retained counsel for such  
14 interviews.

15 **I.**

16 **BACKGROUND**

17 Petitioners’ declarations in support of their motion provide the following  
18 background facts. Petitioners are the parents of a family of five children that fled their  
19 home country of Guatemala after suffering extortion, death threats, and rape. (Mot. for  
20 TRO at 14). Like many families, they traveled through Mexico to seek asylum in the  
21 United States. (*Id.*) While in Mexico, Petitioners and their children were threatened at gun  
22 point, assaulted, robbed, and stripped of their clothing. (*Id.*) Their attackers, masked men  
23 seemingly clothed in Mexican government uniforms, threatened to kill Petitioners if they  
24 reported the incident. (*Id.*) These threats have left Petitioners and their children terrified.  
25 (*Id.*)

26 Upon entering the United States, Petitioners immediately requested asylum. (*Id.*)  
27 Prior to December 2018, asylum seekers like Petitioners were placed in expedited removal  
28 (“ER”) proceedings. 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1). If they expressed a fear of persecution or

1 torture upon removal to their country of origin, the asylum seekers were given a credible  
2 fear interview (“CFI”) to determine whether there was a significant possibility they were  
3 eligible for asylum. 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1)(A)(i). If they passed the CFI, they were placed  
4 in full removal proceedings before an immigration judge (“IJ”) to present their asylum  
5 case. 8 U.S.C. §§ 1229a(c)(4), 1225(b)(1)(B)(ii). After December 2018, however, the  
6 MPP was instituted and the process changed.

7 As noted, asylum seekers arriving on land from Mexico are now required under the  
8 MPP to remain in Mexico while their immigration proceedings are pending. (Res. to Mot.  
9 for TRO, Exs. 1, 4). If an asylum seeker expresses fear of returning to Mexico, then he or  
10 she is detained by Customs and Border Protection (“CBP”) pending a non-*refoulement*  
11 interview with a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”) asylum officer to  
12 determine whether they are more likely than not to face persecution or torture in Mexico.  
13 (Mot. for TRO at 16.) While awaiting a non-*refoulement* interview, an asylum seeker does  
14 not have the ability to communicate confidentially with retained counsel. (*Id.* at 17–18.)  
15 Furthermore, retained counsel may not be present during non-*refoulement* interviews,  
16 which are conducted telephonically and can last up to several hours. (*Id.* at 16, 17–18.)  
17 *See* Compl., ¶ 144 (Respondent Department of Homeland Security “has a written policy  
18 mandating a blanket denial of access to counsel to individuals subject to MPP who are in  
19 its custody while awaiting and during non-*refoulement* interviews.”)) If an individual  
20 passes the non-*refoulement* interview, they are removed from MPP and either released on  
21 parole or detained in the United States, pending removal proceedings. Mot. for TRO at 17.  
22 If the individual does not pass, they must await the outcome of their removal proceedings  
23 in Mexico. (*Id.*)

24 In accordance with the MPP, Petitioners were returned to Mexico to await the  
25 outcome of their removal proceedings. (*Id.*) While in Tijuana, Petitioners survived a  
26 shoot-out that occurred outside their temporary shelter. (*Id.* at 15.) Because of this  
27 violence and the trauma Petitioners experienced while traveling through Mexico,  
28 Petitioners expressed a fear of returning to Mexico during an immigration proceeding on

1 November 5, 2019. (*Id.* at 19.) Bound by the duty of non-*refoulement*, the United States  
2 placed Petitioners and their children in CBP detention to await their non-*refoulement*  
3 interviews. (*Id.*) During their detention, Petitioners have not been allowed to  
4 confidentially communicate with their retained counsel. (*Id.*) The same day on which they  
5 expressed a fear of returning to Mexico, Petitioners commenced the present action and filed  
6 the subject motion.

## 7 II. 8 DISCUSSION

9 Petitioners seek a TRO allowing them access to their retained counsel while in CBP  
10 custody and during their non-*refoulement* interviews. Before turning to the merits and  
11 other injunctive relief factors, the Court addresses Respondents' various jurisdictional  
12 arguments, including that there is no case or controversy under Article III, § 2 of the United  
13 States Constitution as the case is moot and that Petitioners are not "in custody" for purposes  
14 of habeas review under 28 U.S.C. § 2241.

15 Under Ninth Circuit law, the completion of activity is not the hallmark of mootness.  
16 *See, e.g., Neighbors of Cuddy Mountain v. Alexander*, 303 F.3d 1059, 1065 (9th Cir. 2002)  
17 (holding plaintiffs' challenge to a timber sale is not moot, despite the completion of the  
18 sale). A case is moot "only where no effective relief for the alleged violation can be given."  
19 *Id.* (citing *Cantrell v. City of Long Beach*, 241 F.3d 674, 678 (9th Cir. 2001)). Here, the  
20 relief Respondents offered was both incomplete and inadequate. The day after Petitioners  
21 filed their motion for TRO, Respondents offered Petitioners the opportunity to speak with  
22 their counsel over the phone for 45 minutes and the telephonic presence of counsel during  
23 their non-*refoulement* interview. (Res. to Mot. for TRO at 13; Rep. to Respondents Res. at  
24 3). Petitioners' counsel requested confidential communication with their clients consistent  
25 with Petitioners' asserted statutory and constitutional rights to counsel, and Respondents  
26 refused. (Res. to Mot. for TRO at 13). Consequently, Petitioners' counsel declined the  
27 offer. (*Id.*) Petitioners remain in CBP detention and Respondents' policy prohibiting  
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1 access to retained counsel remains in effect. Therefore, effective relief for the alleged  
2 violation may still be given and the issue is not moot.

3 Respondents' argument that Petitioners are not "in custody" for purposes of 28  
4 U.S.C. § 2241 also fails. "Section 2241 requires a petitioner to be "in custody" at the time  
5 of filing for the federal courts to have jurisdiction over a habeas petition." *Smith v. U.S.*  
6 *Customs & Border Patrol Prot.*, 741 F.3d 1016, 1019 (9th Cir. 2014). A petitioner is "in  
7 custody" if he is subject to conditions that "significantly confine and restrain his freedom."  
8 *Jones v. Cunningham*, 371 U.S. 236, 243 (1963). Petitioners are currently being held in  
9 CPB detention facilities. (Mot. for TRO at 18). Their freedom is clearly confined and  
10 restrained: they cannot come and go as they please, they have little room to walk, and they  
11 allege they are subjected to cold temperatures and lack access to basic necessities,  
12 including toothpaste, hygiene products, and changes of clothing. (*Id.* at 18–19.)  
13 Respondents argue this kind of detention does not constitute "custody" because it is brief  
14 and incidental to Petitioners' removal proceedings.<sup>1</sup> Neither of these reasons, however,  
15 confronts whether Petitioners are subject to conditions that significantly confine and  
16 restrain their freedom. Given the allegations at issue, Petitioners are "in custody" for  
17 purposes of § 2241.<sup>2</sup>

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20 <sup>1</sup> Respondents also argue that if Petitioners are returned to Mexico under the MPP, then  
21 they will not be considered "in custody." This argument is beside the point. At the time  
22 of their filing, Petitioners were in CBP custody, not in Mexico. (Mot. for TRO at 19.)

23 <sup>2</sup> Respondents have raised other related meritless jurisdictional and procedural arguments,  
24 including that Petitioners seek an advisory opinion and allege only speculative injury. As  
25 discussed, the alleged deprivation of a statutory and constitutional right to counsel is a  
26 redressable injury. Seeking a determination that the right of access to retained counsel  
27 exists and has been violated under the circumstances does not invite an advisory opinion.  
28 Respondents also argue that Petitioners have no private right of action to sue for anything  
arising from the non-*refoulement* interview process, as the process was established to  
satisfy "non self-executing" treaty obligations, citing among other things the Convention  
Against Torture Act. But Petitioners are not suing under a treaty or related Act. Their  
claims arise under the APA and the Constitution of the United States. Finally, Respondents  
argue that judicial review of international non-*refoulement* obligations is prohibited, citing

1 With these findings, the Court turns to the TRO. The purpose of a TRO is to preserve  
2 the status quo before a preliminary injunction hearing may be held; its provisional remedial  
3 nature is designed merely to prevent irreparable loss of rights prior to judgment. *Granny*  
4 *Goose Foods, Inc. v. Brotherhood of Teamsters & Auto Truck Drivers*, 415 U.S. 423, 439  
5 (1974). The standard for issuing a temporary restraining order is identical to the standard  
6 for issuing a preliminary injunction. *Lockheed Missile & Space Co., Inc. v. Hughes*  
7 *Aircraft Co.*, 887 F. Supp. 1320, 1323 (N.D. Cal. 1995). Injunctive relief is an  
8 “extraordinary remedy that may only be awarded upon a clear showing that the plaintiff is  
9 entitled to such relief.” *Winter v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc.*, 555 U.S. 7, 22 (2008).  
10 To meet that showing, Petitioners must demonstrate “[they are] likely to succeed on the  
11 merits, that [they are] likely to suffer irreparable harm in the absence of preliminary relief,  
12 that the balance of equities tips in [their] favor, and that an injunction is in the public  
13 interest.” *Am. Trucking Ass’ns v. City of Los Angeles*, 559 F.3d 1046, 1052 (9th Cir. 2009)  
14 (quoting *Winter*, 555 U.S. at 20).<sup>3</sup> Each factor is met.

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18 the rule of “non-inquiry” and *Prasoprat v. Benov*, 421 F.3d 1009, 1016 (9th Cir. 2019)  
19 (stating courts must refrain from second-guessing executive branch determinations  
20 “whether extradition should be denied on humanitarian grounds or on account of the  
21 treatment that the fugitive is likely to receive upon his return to the requesting state.”) This  
22 strawman argument fares no better than Respondents’ other arguments. Petitioners are not  
23 challenging an executive branch decision to return Petitioners to Mexico. Rather, they are  
24 seeking to vindicate rights provided to them under federal law.

25 <sup>3</sup> The Ninth Circuit applies separate standards for injunctions depending on whether they  
26 are prohibitory, *i.e.* they prevent future conduct, or mandatory, *i.e.* “they go beyond  
27 ‘maintaining the status quo[.]’” *Hernandez v. Sessions*, 872 F.3d 976, 997 (9th Cir. 2017).  
28 To the extent Petitioners are requesting mandatory relief, that request is “subject to a higher  
standard than prohibitory injunctions,” namely that relief will issue only “when ‘extreme  
or very serious damage will result’ that is not capable of compensation in damages,” and  
the merits of the case are not ‘doubtful.’” *Id.* at 999 (quoting *Marlyn Nutraceuticals, Inc.*  
*v. Mucos Pharma GmbH & Co.*, 571 F.3d 873, 879 (9th Cir. 2009)). Under either standard,  
Petitioners have met their burden for the reasons set out above.

1 **A. Likelihood of Success**

2 “The first factor under *Winter* is the most important—likely success on the merits.”  
3 *Garcia v. Google, Inc.*, 786 F.3d 733, 740 (9th Cir. 2015). While Petitioners carry the  
4 burden of demonstrating likelihood of success, they are not required to prove their case in  
5 full at this stage but only such portions that enable them to obtain the injunctive relief they  
6 seek. *See Univ. of Texas v. Camenisch*, 451 U.S. 390, 395 (1981).

7 Here, Petitioners argue they are likely to succeed on the merits because under the  
8 APA “default provision,” they have a right of access to counsel of their choice during and  
9 before their non-*refoulement* interview. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 555(b) (“A person compelled to  
10 appear in person before an agency or representative thereof is entitled to be accompanied,  
11 represented, and advised by counsel . . .”). Respondents argue that the Immigration and  
12 Nationality Act (“INA”) supersedes the APA default provision, citing *Marcello v. Bonds*,  
13 349 U.S. 302, 309 (1955), and *Ardestani v. INS*, 502 U.S. 129, 133 (1991), and that under  
14 the INA, Petitioners are not permitted access to retained counsel before or during their  
15 interview.

16 There are two flaws in Respondents’ argument. First, neither *Marcello* nor  
17 *Ardestani* stands for the proposition that the INA supersedes the APA in *all* immigration  
18 proceedings. The Supreme Court in *Marcello* held that § 242(b) of the INA, the precursor  
19 to the modern removal proceeding statute in 28 U.S.C. § 1229a, supplants the APA as “the  
20 sole and exclusive procedure for deportation proceedings.” *Marcello*, 349 U.S. at 310.  
21 The Court cited the INA’s “laborious adaption of the [APA] to the deportation process,  
22 the specific points at which deviations from the [APA] were made, the recognition in the  
23 legislative history of this adaptive technique and of the particular deviations, and the  
24 direction in the statute . . .” in determining the INA, and not the APA, governed. *Id.* The  
25 Court in *Ardestani*, relying on its decision in *Marcello*, held that because plaintiff’s  
26 deportation proceedings were not subject to the APA, plaintiff could not seek attorney fees  
27 under the Equal Access to Justice Act. *Ardestani*, 502 U.S. at 134. Both cases deal  
28 specifically with deportation proceedings, not immigration proceedings in general. This

1 distinction is significant: the INA lays out “a specialized’ and “very particularized”  
2 procedure for deportation proceedings, indicating congressional intent to displace the APA  
3 in the context of deportation proceedings. *Marcello*, 349 U.S. at 308–09. Where the INA  
4 is silent, however, there is no evidence of such congressional intent. *See, e.g., Shaughnessy*  
5 *v. Pedreiro*, 349 U.S. 48, 51 (1955) (holding that the INA does not supersede the APA’s  
6 right to judicial review because there is no language in the INA which “expressly  
7 supersedes or modifies” § 10 of the APA). In other words, if the INA does not provide  
8 the procedure, the APA default provisions necessarily still apply. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 559  
9 (“Subsequent statute may not be held to supersede or modify [the APA’s protection of the  
10 right of access to retained counsel], except to the extent that it does so expressly.”).

11 The second flaw in Respondents’ argument is that even if the INA did supplant the  
12 APA here, the INA does not address whether Petitioners have a right of access to counsel  
13 prior to and during non-*refoulement* interviews. Respondents note that under the INA,  
14 asylum seekers may consult with retained counsel prior to and during a CFI, but not during  
15 expedited removal proceedings or primary or secondary inspections. *See* 8 C.F.R. §  
16 208.30(d)(4) (stating that an asylum seeker may consult with a person prior to and during  
17 her CFI); *United States v. Barajas-Alvarado*, 655 F.3d 1077, 1088 (9th Cir. 2011) (finding  
18 “no legal basis for [the claim] that non-admitted aliens who have not entered the United  
19 States have a right to representation” during expedited removal proceedings). By contrast,  
20 there are no provisions addressing whether asylum seekers have access to retained counsel  
21 prior to and during a non-*refoulement* interview. (Res. to Mot. for TRO at 21).  
22 Respondents argue this lack of mention necessarily means that asylum seekers do not have  
23 such a right. The Court, however, disagrees. Where the INA is silent, the APA default  
24 provisions necessarily apply; to hold otherwise would be to render the default provisions  
25 obsolete. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 559 (stating subsequent statute may not supersede or modify the  
26 APA unless “it does so expressly.”).

27 Access to retained counsel for a non-*refoulement* interview, which is undisputedly  
28 not a part of formal removal proceedings, is not addressed in the INA. The INA, therefore,



1 has not expressly superseded the APA’s default provision concerning access to retained  
 2 counsel. Consequently, § 555(b) of the APA applies.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, the Court finds  
 3 there is a likelihood of success on Petitioners’ statutory claim under the APA, 5 U.S.C. §  
 4 555(b).<sup>5</sup>

### 5 **B. Irreparable Injury and Balance of Equities**

6 Turning to the next three factors, Petitioners must show they are “‘likely to suffer  
 7 irreparable harm in the absence of preliminary relief[,]’” and demonstrate that “‘the balance  
 8 of equities tips in [their] favor.’” *Hernandez*, 872 F.3d at 995 (quoting *Winter*, 555 U.S. at  
 9 20). Petitioners have met their burden.

10 Petitioners allege that without access to counsel, they risk the irreparable harm of a  
 11 non-reviewable erroneous decision that forces them to return to Mexico to face persecution.  
 12 Petitioners emphasize the complexity of non-*refoulement* interviews that they—as  
 13 unsophisticated migrants in stressful and foreign circumstances—do not understand; and  
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<sup>4</sup> The issue of whether access to retained counsel includes confidential, in-person communication, as opposed to telephonic communication, has not been briefed in this case. The parties should be prepared to address this issue in their preliminary injunction briefing. For the purposes of these Petitioners, however, the Court orders confidential, in-person access to retained counsel prior to Petitioners’ non-*refoulement* interviews. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 555(b) (“A person compelled to appear in person before an agency or representative thereof is entitled to be *accompanied*, represented, and advised by counsel . . . .”) (emphasis added); *Black’s Law Dictionary* (11th ed. 2019) (defining accompany as “to go along with (another)” or “to attend”); *United States v. McPhaul*, 617 F. Supp. 58, 59 (W.D.N.C. 1985) (“Under 5 U.S.C. § 555(b), there is a right to have counsel present whenever a person is compelled to appear.”). Petitioners seem to concede confidential, in-person access to counsel is not required during the non-*refoulement* interview because “attorney participation in that interview does not require confidentiality and the interview itself is telephonic, placing counsel on equal footing with the adjudicators.” (Rep. to Respondents Res. at 3 n.2).

<sup>5</sup> In light of Petitioners’ likelihood of success on their first claim for relief under the APA, 5 U.S.C. § 555(b) (right of access to retained counsel), the Court declines to address the balance of Petitioners’ statutory and constitutional claims under the APA and First and Fifth Amendments to the United States Constitution. (*See* Class Action Complaint and Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus, Second through Fifth Claims for Relief, ECF No. 1.)

1 that without access to their counsel, their ability to answer questions and meaningfully  
2 participate in the interview is significantly impaired. Given the high stakes of the  
3 interview, the Court finds Petitioners have shown likelihood of irreparable harm.

4 The same reasoning suggests the balance of hardships tips in Petitioners favor. In  
5 Respondents' opposition, they raise the specter of national security, but fail to show how  
6 allowing access to counsel threatens security. At oral argument, Respondents' counsel  
7 referenced logistical difficulties in allowing access to counsel, but provided no evidence in  
8 support. On the other hand, Petitioners face potential persecution and harm should they be  
9 returned to Mexico. The balance of these factors tips decidedly in favor of Petitioners.

### 10 **C. Public Interest**

11 The final factor for consideration is the public interest. *See Hernandez*, 872 F.3d at  
12 996. To obtain the requested relief, “[p]laintiffs must demonstrate that the public interest  
13 favors granting the injunction ‘in light of [its] likely consequences,’ i.e., ‘consequences  
14 [that are not] too remote, insubstantial, or speculative and [are] supported by evidence.’”  
15 *Id.* (quoting *Stormans, Inc. v. Selecky*, 586 F.3d 1109, 1139 (9th Cir. 2009)).

16 Here, the public interest is served by allowing Petitioners' access to retained counsel  
17 prior to and during their non-*refoulement* interviews. It would not be “‘in the public’s  
18 interest to allow the [government] . . . to violate the requirements of federal law, especially  
19 when there are not adequate remedies available.’” *Ariz. Dream Act Coal. v. Brewer*, 757  
20 F.3d 1053, 1069 (9th Cir. 2014) (quoting *Melendres v. Arpaio*, 695 F.3d 990, 1002 (9th  
21 Cir. 2012)). Given the procedural protections provided by the APA and the lack of  
22 appealability of the non-*refoulement* interview, the public’s interest weighs in favor of  
23 granting Petitioners motion.

## 24 **III.**

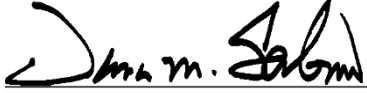
### 25 **CONCLUSION**

26 For these reasons, Petitioners' motion for temporary restraining order is granted.  
27 Respondents may not conduct Petitioners' non-*refoulement* interviews without first  
28 affording them access to their retained counsel both before and during any such interview.

1 Pending before the Court are Petitioners' motions for class certification and  
2 preliminary injunction. Respondents shall respond to the motions by **November 27, 2019**  
3 **at 5:00 p.m.**, and Petitioners shall file their replies by **December 6, 2019 at 5 p.m.** The  
4 parties are ordered to meet and confer in person by no later than **December 4, 2019** to  
5 attempt resolution of these matters. Absent resolution, the motions will be heard on  
6 **December 13, 2019 at 1:30 p.m.**

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8 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

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10 Dated: November 12, 2019

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12 Hon. Dana M. Sabraw  
13 United States District Judge  
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