

**FILED**

February 18, 2004

Charles R. Fulbruge III  
Clerk

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

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No. 03-50823  
Conference Calendar

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff-Appellee,

versus

JOSE HERNANDEZ-PUGA,

Defendant-Appellant.

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Appeal from the United States District Court  
for the Western District of Texas  
USDC No. DR-03-CR-166-1-AML  
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Before HIGGINBOTHAM, EMILIO M. GARZA, and PRADO, Circuit Judges.

PER CURIAM:\*

Jose Hernandez-Puga appeals the sentence imposed following his guilty plea conviction of being found in the United States after deportation/removal in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1326. Hernandez-Puga contends that 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b)(2) is an unconstitutional sentencing provision. He argues that his sentence exceeds the two-year maximum term of imprisonment which may be imposed under 8 U.S.C. § 1326(a).

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\* Pursuant to 5TH CIR. R. 47.5, the court has determined that this opinion should not be published and is not precedent except under the limited circumstances set forth in 5TH CIR. R. 47.5.4.

In Almendarez-Torres v. United States, 523 U.S. 224, 235 (1998), the Supreme Court held that the enhanced penalties in 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b) are sentencing provisions, not elements of separate offenses. The Court further held that the sentencing provisions do not violate the Due Process Clause. Id. at 239-47. Hernandez-Puga acknowledges that his argument is foreclosed by Almendarez-Torres, but asserts that the decision has been cast into doubt by Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466, 490 (2000). He seeks to preserve his argument for further review.

Apprendi did not overrule Almendarez-Torres. See Apprendi, 530 U.S. at 489-90; United States v. Dabeit, 231 F.3d 979, 984 (5th Cir. 2000). This court must follow Almendarez-Torres "unless and until the Supreme Court itself determines to overrule it." Dabeit, 231 F.3d at 984 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). The judgment of the district court is AFFIRMED.

The Government has moved for a summary affirmance in lieu of filing an appellee's brief. In its motion, the Government asks that an appellee's brief not be required. The motion is GRANTED.

AFFIRMED; MOTION GRANTED.