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No.

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In the Supreme Court of the United States

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, PETITIONER

v.

REGINALD KEITH HAGEN

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

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTION PRESENTED

Section 922(g)(9) of Title 18, United States Code, makes it a crime for any person convicted of a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” to possess a firearm. The term “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” is defined to include any federal, state, or tribal misdemeanor offense, committed by a person with a specified domestic relationship to the victim, that “has, as an element, the use or attempted use of physical force, or the threatened use of a deadly weapon.” 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(33)(A)(ii). The question presented is:

Whether respondent’s Texas conviction for misdemeanor assault by intentionally and knowingly causing bodily injury to a family member qualifies as a conviction for a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.”

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PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

The Acting Solicitor General, on behalf of the United States of America, respectfully petitions for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in this case.

OPINIONS BELOW

The per curiam order of the court of appeals (App., *infra*, 1a-2a) is not published in the *Federal Reporter* but is available at 349 Fed. Appx. 896. The order of the district court granting respondent's motion to dismiss the indictment (App., *infra*, 3a-5a) is unreported.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the court of appeals was entered on October 14, 2009. A petition for rehearing was denied on March 3, 2010 (App., *infra*, 17a-18a). On May 28, 2010, Justice Scalia extended the time within which to file a petition

for a writ of certiorari to and including June 15, 2010. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. 1254(1).

STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The relevant statutory provisions are reprinted in an appendix to this petition. App., *infra*, 22a-23a.

STATEMENT

Respondent was indicted on two counts of possession of a firearm by a person convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, in violation of 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(9), and two counts of making false statements concerning whether he had been convicted of such an offense, in violation of 18 U.S.C. 924(a)(1)(A) and 18 U.S.C. 922(a)(6), respectively. Concluding that respondent's prior Texas conviction for misdemeanor assault on a family member was not a conviction for a "misdemeanor crime of domestic violence," the district court dismissed the indictment. The court of appeals affirmed. App., *infra*, 1a-2a.

1. Under 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(9), it is unlawful for any person "who has been convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence * * * [to] possess in or affecting commerce, any firearm or ammunition." Section 921(a)(33)(A) defines "misdemeanor crime of domestic violence" as a misdemeanor under federal, state, or tribal law, committed by a person with a specified domestic relationship with the victim, that "has, as an element, the use or attempted use of physical force, or the threatened use of a deadly weapon." 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(33)(A)(ii); see *United States v. Hayes*, 129 S. Ct. 1079, 1084 (2009). A person who knowingly violates that provision may be fined, imprisoned for not more than ten years, or both. 18 U.S.C. 924(a)(2).

2. In 2005, respondent was charged in Texas state court with misdemeanor assault in violation of Texas Penal

Code § 22.01(a)(1), which punishes any person who “intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly causes bodily injury to another, including the person’s spouse.” Tex. Penal Code Ann. § 22.01(a)(1) (West 2003). A violation of Section 22.01(a)(1) is a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by confinement in jail for a term not to exceed one year. *Id.* § 12.21(a) (West 2003); *id.* § 22.01(b) (West Supp. 2004). The criminal information alleged that respondent “did * * * unlawfully, intentionally and knowingly cause bodily injury to [the victim], a member of the Defendant’s FAMILY, and hereafter styled the Complainant by STRIKING THE COMPLAINANT ON THE HEAD WITH THE DEFENDANT’S HAND.” App., *infra*, 19a. Respondent was convicted of the offense, and the state court made an affirmative finding of domestic violence. *Id.* at 20a-21a.¹ Respondent was sentenced to one year of confinement, which was suspended in favor of two years of probation. His probation was later revoked, and he was sentenced to 60 days of confinement. *Ibid.*

3. In 2007, law enforcement officials discovered that respondent had possessed and attempted to purchase firearms after his 2005 conviction. Respondent was indicted on two counts of possession of a firearm by a person convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, in violation of 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(9) (Counts 1 and 4), and two counts of making false statements concerning whether he had been

¹ A domestic relationship between the offender and the victim is not a required element of the assault offense under Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1), but Texas courts include family-violence findings in criminal judgments to facilitate the prosecution of any subsequent assault against a family member as a felony under Texas Penal Code § 22.01(b)(2). See Tex. Code Crim. P. Ann. art. 42.013 (West 2006); *State v. Eakins*, 71 S.W.3d 443, 444-445 (Tex. App. 2002).

convicted of such an offense, in violation of 18 U.S.C. 924(a)(1)(A) (Count 2) and 18 U.S.C. 922(a)(6) (Count 3).

Respondent moved to dismiss the indictment, arguing that his Texas assault offense is not a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” because it does not “ha[ve], as an element, the use * * * of physical force.” 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(33)(A). The district court granted the motion. App., *infra*, 3a-5a.

The district court acknowledged that the Fifth Circuit had previously held that a violation of Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) qualifies as a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” because the offense has as an element the use of physical force. App., *infra*, 4a, 5a (citing *United States v. Shelton*, 325 F.3d 553 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 540 U.S. 916 (2003), and 543 U.S. 1057 (2005)). But the district court concluded that *Shelton* had been superseded by subsequent circuit precedent, as recognized in *United States v. Villegas-Hernandez*, 468 F.3d 874 (2006), cert. denied, 549 U.S. 1245 (2007). App., *infra*, 5a.²

In *Villegas-Hernandez*, the Fifth Circuit held that a violation of Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) is not a “crime of violence” under 18 U.S.C. 16(a)—which, much like Section 921(a)(33)(A), defines the term to mean an offense “that has as an element the use * * * of physical force against the person or property of another”—because assault by causing bodily injury does not have as an “element” the use of “physical force.” 468 F.3d at 878-883. Understanding Section 16(a)’s reference to “physical force” to mean “‘destructive or violent force,’” the court reasoned that injury “could result from any of a number of acts, with-

² In so concluding, the district court adopted the more extensive analysis of an earlier memorandum and order in the case of *United States v. King*, No. H-06-0363 (S.D. Tex. July 10, 2007). App., *infra*, 6a-14a; see *id.* at 5a.

out use of ‘destructive or violent force,’” such as “making available to the victim a poisoned drink while reassuring him the drink is safe, or telling the victim he can safely back his car out while knowing an approaching car driven by an independently acting third party will hit the victim.” *Id.* at 879.

The *Villegas-Hernandez* court acknowledged that *Shelton* had earlier held that Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) had a use-of-force element for purposes of the definition of “misdemeanor crime of violence” in Section 921(a)(33)(A). 468 F.3d at 880. The court, however, declined to rely on *Shelton*. The court relied instead on an intervening en banc decision, *United States v. Vargas-Duran*, 356 F.3d 598 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 541 U.S. 965, and 543 U.S. 995 (2004), in which the court held that the crime of driving under the influence and causing bodily injury is not a “crime of violence” under a similarly worded definition of the term in Sentencing Guidelines § 2L1.2. See Sentencing Guidelines § 2L1.2, comment. (n.1(B)(iii)). In so holding, the en banc court in *Vargas-Duran* had explained that “[t]here is . . . a difference between a defendant’s causation of an injury and the defendant’s use of force.” *Villegas-Hernandez*, 468 F.3d at 880 (quoting *Vargas-Duran*, 356 F.3d at 606).

The *Villegas-Hernandez* court also acknowledged that the defendant in that case had been charged with and admitted to hitting a family member. It held, however, that it could not rely on the charging document or plea-colloquy admission to conclude that the defendant had been convicted of an assault offense involving the use of force. 468 F.3d at 882-883; see, e.g., *Nijhawan v. Holder*, 129 S. Ct. 2294, 2302-2303 (2009) (describing the so-called modified categorical approach, which permits courts to consult certain judicial records to narrow the basis for a defendant’s conviction under a criminal statute that sweeps more

broadly than a generic federal definition). The court explained that, “if statutory language is wholly result-oriented, as here, an offense is not a crime of violence under subsection 16(a) simply because an indictment or information describes force being used in a particular commission of that offense.” *Villegas-Hernandez*, 468 F.3d at 883.

Concluding that *Villegas-Hernandez* resolved the issue, the district court in this case agreed with respondent that his conviction under Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) did not qualify as a predicate “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” for purposes of Section 922(g)(9). App., *infra*, 5a. The court accordingly dismissed the indictment. *Ibid*.

4. The United States appealed and sought initial hearing en banc, but the court of appeals denied en banc review. App., *infra*, 15a-16a. The court of appeals then affirmed in an unpublished ruling. *Id.* at 1a-2a. In a per curiam order, the court held that the district court had correctly relied on *Villegas-Hernandez* in concluding that assault in violation of Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) does not qualify as a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” under Section 922(g)(9). *Id.* at 2a. The United States sought en banc rehearing, but the court declined to reconsider its decision. *Id.* at 17a-18a.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

The Fifth Circuit has concluded that a person convicted of misdemeanor assault by causing bodily injury to a family member has not been convicted of a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” under 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(9), because, in the court’s view, it is possible to cause bodily injury without “us[ing] * * * physical force” against the victim. 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(33)(A)(ii). That conclusion misinterprets the statute. It disregards the statute’s language, overlooks its common-law background, and elevates hypothetical exam-

ples over prototypical applications of the covered offense. The decision also conflicts with the decisions of other courts of appeals to address the issue. If left unreviewed, the court's decision threatens to impede effective and uniform enforcement of Section 922(g)(9), since domestic abusers are routinely prosecuted under assault and battery statutes that punish the causation of bodily injury without specifying the means by which the victim's injury must have been caused. This Court's review is warranted.

A. The Decision Below Incorrectly Constricts The Scope Of Section 922(g)(9)

In Section 922(g)(9), Congress extended the longstanding federal prohibition on firearm possession by any person convicted of a felony, 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(1), to persons convicted of "misdemeanor crime[s] of domestic violence." See *United States v. Hayes*, 129 S. Ct. 1079, 1082 (2009). Congress defined the term "misdemeanor crime of domestic violence" to mean an offense that is a misdemeanor under state, federal, or tribal law, that "has, as an element, the use or attempted use of physical force, or the threatened use of a deadly weapon, committed by" a person with a specified domestic relationship with the victim. 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(33)(A); see *Hayes*, 129 S. Ct. at 1087.

The court of appeals in this case concluded that the federal prohibition on firearm ownership by persons convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence had no application to an individual convicted of assaulting a family member by intentionally and knowingly causing her bodily injury.³ The court relied on the view expressed in *United*

³ Although Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) also punishes any individual who "recklessly causes bodily injury to another," Tex. Penal Code Ann. § 22.01(a)(1) (West 2003), respondent was specifically charged with the intentional and knowing causation of bodily injury, see

States v. Villegas-Hernandez, 468 F.3d 874 (2006), cert. denied, 549 U.S. 1245 (2007), that bodily injury can be caused without the use of force—by, for example, “making available to the victim a poisoned drink while reassuring him the drink is safe, or telling the victim he can safely back his car out while knowing an approaching car driven by an independently acting third party will hit the victim.” *Id.* at 879; see App., *infra*, 2a. That analysis is seriously flawed in at least three respects.

1. First, as a matter of ordinary usage, the defendant’s “use” of “physical force” is an “element” of the offense of assault by causing bodily injury because physical force is the means by which injury is necessarily produced. As the First Circuit reasoned in *United States v. Nason*, 269 F.3d 10 (2001), “to cause *physical* injury, force necessarily must be *physical* in nature.” *Id.* at 20. A person who intentionally or knowingly causes injury to another must “use,” or actively employ, physical force to achieve that result. See *Leocal v. Ashcroft*, 543 U.S. 1, 9 (2004) (explaining that the word “use” in the context of the definition of “crime of violence” in 18 U.S.C. 16(a) means “active employment”) (citing *Bailey v. United States*, 516 U.S. 137, 144 (1995)). To convict a defendant of bodily-injury assault, the prosecution must therefore prove that the defendant used physical force against the victim.

As the court of appeals seems to have acknowledged, see *Villegas-Hernandez*, 468 F.3d at 882-883, a person employs physical force against another when he causes bodily injury by making direct physical contact with his victim—

App., *infra*, 19a. Respondent accordingly has conceded that Section 22.01(a)(1) “may, for present purposes, be ‘pared down’ to exclude consideration of the alternative *mens rea* of ‘recklessly.’” Resp. C.A. Br. 8; see, e.g., *Nijhawan v. Holder*, 129 S. Ct. 2294, 2302-2303 (2009) (describing the modified categorical approach).

for example, by striking her with his hand. But the same is true in the unusual cases that the court of appeals imagined in *Villegas-Hernandez*, in which the assailant causes physical harm without making direct physical contact. “If someone lures a poor swimmer into waters with a strong undertow in order that he drown, or tricks a victim into walking toward a high precipice so that he might fall,” for example, the offender “has at least attempted to make use of physical force against the person of the target, either through the action of water to cause asphyxiation or by impact of earth on flesh and bone.” *United States v. Calderon-Pena*, 383 F.3d 254, 270 (5th Cir. 2004) (en banc) (Smith, J., dissenting), cert. denied, 543 U.S. 1076 (2005). “However remote these forces may be in time or distance from the defendant, they were still directed to work according to his will, as surely as was a swung fist or a fired bullet.” *Ibid.* (Smith, J., dissenting); cf., e.g., *United States v. De La Fuente*, 353 F.3d 766, 770-771 (9th Cir. 2003) (concluding that a threat of anthrax poisoning qualifies as a “threatened use of physical force” under Section 16(a), and explaining that “the bacteria’s physical effect on the body is no less violently forceful than the effect of a kick or a blow”).

A contrary conclusion would lead to absurd consequences. Many States define a range of crimes against the person, from simple assault to murder, by specifying a particular result (e.g., the causation of “bodily injury” or “death”), without explicitly specifying the means by which an offender must have achieved that result. See, e.g., Ala. Code § 13A-6-2(a)(1) (LexisNexis Supp. 2009) (“A person commits the crime of murder if * * * [w]ith intent to cause the death of another person, he or she causes the death of that person or of another person.”); Alaska Stat. § 11.41.100(a)(1) (2008) (similar); Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 13-1105(A)(1) (2010) (similar); Colo. Rev. Stat.

§ 18-3-102(1)(a) (2009) (similar); Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 53a-54a(a) (West 2007) (similar). Many such offenses can be committed by means of subtle and indirect uses of physical force, as well as direct physical contact between the offender and the victim. See generally 2 Wayne R. LaFave, *Substantive Criminal Law* § 14.2(c), at 433 (2d ed. 2003) (LaFave) (“While the method of producing an intentional death is usually some weapon in the hands of the murderer, * * * sometimes more subtle means are used.”). Yet under the court of appeals’ analysis, even murder would not have as an element the use of force, since it can be accomplished through poisoning. See *Villegas-Hernandez*, 468 F.3d at 879.

Congress cannot have intended that result. Many federal crime-of-violence provisions, like Section 921(a)(33)(A), define predicate acts to include offenses that have as an element the use of physical force. See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. 16(a) (defining “crime of violence”); *Leocal*, 543 U.S. at 7 (noting that Section 16 has been “incorporated into a variety of statutory provisions, both criminal and noncriminal”); 18 U.S.C. 373(a), 521(c)(2), 924(c)(3)(A), 924(e)(2)(B)(i); 20 U.S.C. 1161w(f)(3)(A)(ii) (Supp. II 2008); 28 U.S.C. 540A(c)(1). Congress undoubtedly intended the use-of-force language of those statutes to encompass quintessential violent crimes such as murder. An interpretation that excludes them is highly suspect. Cf. *Calderon-Pena*, 383 F.3d at 270-271 (Smith, J., dissenting) (noting that “it would be absurd” to believe that murder would not involve the “use of physical force” because “the crime of murder in many states may be satisfied by subtle and indirect uses of force”).

2. The court of appeals’ interpretation also conflicts with the “more specialized legal usage” of the phrase “use . . . of physical force” to describe the common-law crime

of battery. *Johnson v. United States*, 130 S. Ct. 1265, 1270-1271 (2010). Battery is defined, in language that tracks the definition of “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” in Section 921(a)(33)(A), as “the intentional application of unlawful force against the person of another.” *Id.* at 1270. At common law, that phrase was understood to reach conduct resulting in either “a bodily injury or an offensive touching.” 2 LaFave § 16.2, at 553; see *Johnson*, 130 S. Ct. at 1271. And as particularly relevant here, battery was understood to reach indirect as well as direct uses of force against the body of the victim. See 2 LaFave § 16.2, at 554; see also 2 Joel Prentiss Bishop, *Bishop on Criminal Law* § 72 a at 48-49 (John M. Zane & Carl Zollman eds., 9th ed. 1923) (discussing cases). A person thus committed a battery when, for example, he “administer[ed] a poison” or “[told] a blind man walking toward a precipice that all is clear ahead.” 2 LaFave § 16.2, at 554-555; see also, *e.g.*, *State v. Monroe*, 28 S.E. 547 (N.C. 1897) (druggist who sold candy laced with sufficient croton oil to cause injury, knowing that the candy would be administered to another as a trick, was guilty of assault and battery); *Commonwealth v. Stratton*, 114 Mass. 303, 304-305 (1874) (defendant, who offered the victim figs that had been drugged without the victim’s knowledge, was guilty of assault and battery); Rollin M. Perkins, *Non-Homicide Offenses Against the Person*, 26 B.U. L. Rev. 119, 122 (1946) (explaining that battery, “an application of force to the person of another,” may be committed by, *inter alia*, “threatening sudden violence and thereby causing another to jump from a window or a moving vehicle or other place”) (footnote omitted).

This Court has recognized that, when Congress uses a term having an established common-law meaning, it ordinarily intends the term to bear that common-law meaning. See, *e.g.*, *Johnson*, 130 S. Ct. at 1270 (citing *United States*

v. *Turley*, 352 U.S. 407, 411 (1957)). Here, where Congress has employed the common-law definition of misdemeanor battery to define the term “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence,” the most natural conclusion is that Congress intended to describe generic, common-law battery crimes, including crimes involving the causation of bodily injury by subtle and indirect uses of physical force. Cf. *id.* at 1271-1272.⁴

⁴ In *Johnson*, the Court considered whether the Florida felony offense of recidivist battery, defined in part as intentionally touching or striking another person against her will, qualified as a “violent felony” under the provision of the Armed Career Criminal Act of 1984 (ACCA) that covers crimes that “ha[ve] as an element the use * * * of physical force against the person of another.” 18 U.S.C. 924(e)(2)(B)(i). The Court acknowledged that, at common law, the “force” element of battery was “satisfied by even the slightest offensive touching.” *Johnson*, 130 S. Ct. at 1270. The Court concluded, however, that the common-law meaning of the term “force” was not controlling because that meaning “does not fit” in the context of the ACCA’s definition of the term “violent felony.” *Ibid.* The Court reasoned that the term “violent,” particularly when “attached to the noun ‘felony,’” connotes “strong physical force.” *Id.* at 1271. The Court also considered it “unlikely” that Congress would employ the common-law definition of battery—a crime punishable as a misdemeanor at common law, and still generally punishable as a misdemeanor today—in defining the term “violent felony.” *Id.* at 1271-1272 (emphasis added).

The Court in *Johnson* reserved the question whether the term “physical force” has the same meaning in the context of Section 922(g)(9)’s definition of “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.” 130 S. Ct. at 1273. Since then, one court of appeals has relied on *Johnson* to conclude that a conviction for common-law battery of a family member does not qualify as a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” because that offense need not have involved the use of “violent force.” *United States v. White*, No. 09-4114, 2010 WL 2169487 (4th Cir. June 1, 2010). The government disagrees with that extension of *Johnson*, and the Acting Solicitor General has authorized the filing of a petition for rehearing. This case, however, provides no occasion to consider that question. The

3. In any event, even if Section 921(a)(33)(A) were read to exclude any assault crime capable of commission by indirect and subtle uses of physical force, the court of appeals identified no evidence that Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) would be applied in that manner. See *United States v. Shelton*, 325 F.3d 553, 561 (5th Cir.) (noting “the absence of a Texas case that indicates that a defendant could be convicted of misdemeanor assault for causing bodily injury without using physical force”), cert. denied, 540 U.S. 916 (2003), and 543 U.S. 1057 (2005). Rather than cite cases, the *Villegas-Hernandez* court simply hypothesized that Section 22.01(a)(1) could be used to punish individuals who lured their victims into harm’s way.

The court of appeals’ approach is inconsistent with this Court’s guidance. In *Gonzales v. Duenas-Alvarez*, 549 U.S. 183 (2007), this Court made clear that “to find that a state statute creates a crime outside the generic definition of a listed crime in a federal statute requires more than the application of legal imagination to a state statute’s language”; it requires a “realistic probability,” and not just a “theoretical possibility,” that the state statute would be applied in a “nongeneric” way. *Id.* at 193. To establish the requisite probability, this Court instructed that an offender “must at least point to his own case or other cases in which the state courts in fact did apply the statute in the special (nongeneric) manner for which he argues.” *Ibid.*

Texas bodily-injury assault offense at issue in this case categorically involves “violent force” as this Court interpreted the term in *Johnson*: that is, “force capable of causing physical pain or injury to another person.” 130 S. Ct. at 1271; see Tex. Penal Code Ann. § 1.07(a)(8) (West 2003) (defining the term “[b]odily injury,” as required by Section 22.01(a)(1), to mean “physical pain, illness, or any impairment of physical condition”).

Here, respondent could not contend that he was convicted under Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) for conduct not involving the use of physical force. See App., *infra*, 19a. And the Fifth Circuit has identified no case in which Texas’s assault statute has been applied to conduct of the sort it imagined in *Villegas-Hernandez*. The court erred by relying on nothing more than highly stylized hypothetical applications of the statute to hold that Texas bodily-injury assault on a family member is not a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” under Section 922(g)(9).

B. The Decision Below Conflicts With The Decisions Of Other Courts Of Appeals

The court of appeals’ conclusion that misdemeanor assault by causing bodily injury to a family member is not a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” squarely conflicts with the decisions of other courts of appeals. Both the First and the Eighth Circuits have held, in decisions contrary to the decision below, that bodily-injury assault qualifies as a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence” within the meaning of Section 921(a)(33)(A). See *Nason*, 269 F.3d at 12, 20 (holding that the provision of the Maine assault statute that prohibits “intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly caus[ing] bodily injury . . . to another,” “unambiguously involves the use of physical force” within the meaning of Section 921(a)(33)(A)(ii)); *United States v. Smith*, 171 F.3d 617, 620-621 (8th Cir. 1999) (holding that the provision of the Iowa assault statute that prohibits “[a]ny act which is intended to cause pain or injury to * * * another,” Iowa Code § 708.1(2) (West 1993), has a use-of-force element within the meaning of Section 921(a)(33)(A)(ii)).⁵ The Fifth

⁵ The First Circuit in *Nason* cited a Maine Supreme Court decision describing the bodily-injury provision of Maine’s assault statute as reaching the “use of unlawful force against another causing bodily in-

Circuit had relied in part on those decisions in its earlier decision in *Shelton*, 325 F.3d at 558-559, in which it had concluded that a violation of Texas Penal Code § 22.01(a)(1) does qualify as a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.” By reversing course here, the Fifth Circuit has brought itself into direct conflict with the First and Eighth Circuits.

The court of appeals’ decision is, on the other hand, consistent with the Second Circuit’s construction of a parallel provision of law. See *Chrzanoski v. Ashcroft*, 327 F.3d 188, 194-196 (2003) (holding that assault by intentionally causing physical injury to another “does not necessarily involve the use of force” for purposes of 18 U.S.C. 16(a) because a defendant could be convicted “for injury caused not by physical force, but by guile, deception, or even deliberate omission”).⁶

jury.” *Nason*, 269 F.3d at 20 (quoting *State v. Griffin*, 459 A.2d 1086, 1091 (Me. 1983)). The court in *Griffin* did not, however, suggest that bodily-injury assault under Maine law is limited to some acts involving the intentional or knowing infliction of bodily injury but not others, and the conclusion that all such acts involve the “use of unlawful force” is consistent with the prevailing use of that phrase in describing the common-law crime of battery. See pp. 10-12, *supra*.

⁶ In addition, courts have reached conflicting results under Sentencing Guidelines provisions that classify offenses by reference to the use of force. Compare, e.g., *United States v. Alexander*, 543 F.3d 819, 823 (6th Cir. 2008) (concluding that the element of causing bodily injury under Michigan’s resisting-arrest statute involves the “use of physical force against the person of another” within the meaning of Sentencing Guidelines § 4B1.2(a)(1)), cert. denied, 129 S. Ct. 2175 (2009), with *United States v. Perez-Vargas*, 414 F.3d 1282, 1285-1287 (10th Cir. 2005) (holding that assault by knowingly or recklessly causing bodily injury to another, Colo. Rev. Stat. § 18-3-204(1)(a) (1986), does not have a use-of-force element for purposes of Sentencing Guidelines § 2L1.2 because defendants could be convicted for acts such as “intentionally placing a

The division in authority is unlikely to be resolved without this Court's intervention. The government twice in this case sought en banc review in the Fifth Circuit and that court declined to reconsider its position. The division is of particular practical significance because it means that application of Section 922(g)(9) to a particular individual will vary depending on the State he or she resides. If, for example, respondent were to move from Texas to Missouri, the same assault conviction held insufficient in the Fifth Circuit would bar respondent from possessing firearms in the Eighth Circuit. This Court's review is warranted.

C. The Question Presented Is Of Recurring Importance

Review is also warranted because the question is one of recurring importance in federal prosecutions and to the administration of a significant federal law.

1. Congress enacted Section 922(g)(9) to provide a nationwide solution to what it regarded as a nationwide problem: the possession of firearms by those convicted of violent crimes against their families. *Hayes*, 129 S. Ct. at 1087. When Congress enacted Section 922(g)(9) in 1996, "domestic abusers were (and are) routinely prosecuted under generally applicable assault or battery laws." *Ibid.* Many States, following the Model Penal Code's approach, define the crime of assault as the unlawful causation of bodily injury. See Model Penal Code § 211.1(1) (1985); see also, *e.g.*, Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 53a-61(a) (West 2007); Del. Code Ann. tit. 11, § 611 (2007). And many more States, following the common-law approach, define assault or battery as involving either the causation of bodily injury or offensive physical contact. See, *e.g.*, Fla. Stat. Ann. § 784.03(1)(a) (West 2007); 720 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann.

barrier in front of a car causing an accident, or intentionally exposing someone to hazardous chemicals").

5/12-3(a)(1) (West 2002). As a consequence, in much of the country, the intentional or knowing causation of bodily injury, without more, is punishable as simple assault or battery.

If, as the court of appeals concluded, convictions under such injury-focused statutes do not have as an element the use of physical force, then it is likely that Section 922(g)(9) will have no application to many persons convicted of misdemeanor domestic-violence crimes in much of the country. Congress would not have intended that result. See *Hayes*, 129 S. Ct. at 1087-1088 (rejecting an interpretation of Section 921(a)(33)(A) that would have rendered Section 922(g)(9) “‘a dead letter’ in some two-thirds of the States from the very moment of its enactment”) (citation omitted); see also *Nijhawan v. Holder*, 129 S. Ct. 2294, 2302 (2009) (rejecting a reading of 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(43)(M)(i) that would leave the provision with little application, doubting “Congress would have intended (M)(i) to apply in so limited and so haphazard a manner”); *Taylor v. United States*, 495 U.S. 575, 594 (1990) (declining to construe the Armed Career Criminal Act’s reference to “burglary” as meaning “common-law burglary,” explaining that such a construction “would come close to nullifying that term’s effect in the statute, because few of the crimes now generally recognized as burglaries would fall within the common-law definition”). This Court’s review is warranted to forestall that dramatic curtailment of the statute.

2. The Fifth Circuit’s erroneous interpretation of the use-of-force language common to Section 921(a)(33)(A) and other federal crime-of-violence definitions is likely significantly to impede enforcement of Section 922(g)(9) in that circuit. Two of the three States within the Fifth Circuit’s jurisdiction punish the unlawful causation of bodily injury, without more, as simple assault. Miss. Code Ann.

§ 97-3-7(1)(a) (West Supp. 2009); Tex. Penal Code Ann. § 22.01(a)(1) (West 2003). The third State, Louisiana, defines simple battery as “the intentional use of force or violence upon the person of another; or the intentional administration of a poison or other noxious liquid or substance to another.” La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 14.33 (2007); cf. *Villegas-Hernandez*, 486 F.3d at 879 (suggesting that assault by poisoning would not qualify as a “misdemeanor crime of domestic violence”).

The practical effects of the Fifth Circuit’s interpretation are not mitigated by the availability of the so-called modified categorical approach, cf. *Johnson*, 130 S. Ct. at 1273, because the *Villegas-Hernandez* court concluded that the Texas offense of assault by causing bodily injury cannot be narrowed by reliance on charging documents and plea colloquy admissions describing the offense as one involving the use of force, see 468 F.3d at 882-883. Resort to the modified categorical approach would not in any event offer a full response to the practical difficulties associated with the court of appeals’ approach, since charging documents often simply track the language of the statute and do not as a general rule set forth a specific factual recitation of the means by which the defendant committed his crime. Cf. *Johnson*, 130 S. Ct. at 1273 (acknowledging that “in many cases state and local records from battery convictions will be incomplete”); *id.* at 1278 (Alito, J., dissenting) (noting it “will often be impossible” to employ the modified categorical approach to narrow the basis of a particular battery conviction).

3. The conflict among the circuits is likely to prove a source of confusion for defendants as well. Defendants with convictions like respondent’s may not be subject to federal prosecution for possession of firearms when they live in the jurisdiction of the Fifth Circuit but can be prosecuted if

they later move to a State within the jurisdictions of the First or Eighth Circuits—and they will be uncertain about their status in other jurisdictions.

The conflict will also have an adverse impact on officials reviewing the lawfulness of certain firearms purchases by out-of-state buyers. See 18 U.S.C. 922(s)-(t). Because of the conflict, officials will have to consider not only the whether the transaction complies with the law of the State in which the transaction occurs, but also whether buyers are permitted to possess firearms under the interpretation of Section 921(a)(33)(A) prevailing in their State of residence—an interpretation that may or may not be consistent with the interpretation prevailing in the State in which the transaction occurs. See 18 U.S.C. 922(a)(3) and (b)(3).

For all of these reasons, this Court's intervention is warranted.

CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted.

Respectfully submitted.

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