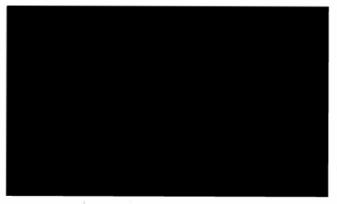
Please note: This successful motion was prepared by the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) in January 2018 for New York Immigration Court. Please be sure to check the relevant and up-to-date caselaw in your jurisdiction. Exhibits have been omitted.



NON-DETAINED

Pro Bono Counsel for Respondents

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW IMMIGRATION COURT NEW YORK, NY

In the Matter of:	ý			20
			File No.	
			File No.	
Respondents))))		AMIO:
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lon. Judge			Next Hearing:	

MOTION TO RESCIND IN ABSENTIA REMOVAL ORDER AND REOPEN PROCEEDINGS

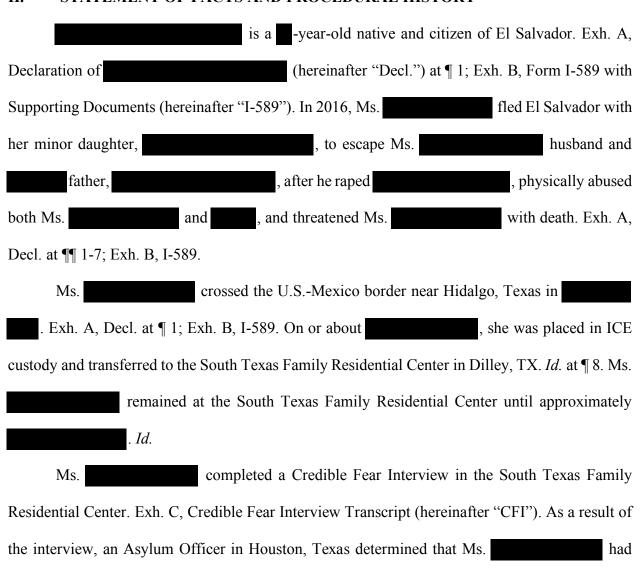
NO FEE REQUIRED PER 8 C.F.R. § 1003.24(b)(2) AS MOTION BASED ON ASYLUM 35 AUTOMATIC STAY OF REMOVAL PER INA § 240(b)(5)(C)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW IMMIGRATION COURT NEW YORK, NY

In the Matter of:))
)) File No.
) File No.
Respondents)))
	IND <i>IN ABSENTIA</i> REMOVAL ORDER REOPEN PROCEEDINGS
I. INTRODUCTION	
Lead Respondent,	("Ms. "), moves thi
Honorable Court to rescind the in all	bsentia removal order which it entered against her and he
minor daughter,	(""), on , and to reopen the
removal proceedings. Because Ms.	failure to appear was due to exceptiona
circumstances and lack of notice an	nd because this motion is timely filed before the 180-da
deadline, their removal from the Un	ited States is automatically stayed until such a time as th
Immigration Court renders a decision	on this motion. INA §240(b)(5)(C).
In this case, Ms.	and her daughter fled severe domestic violence
in El Salvador, including rape, beati	ings, and death threats. In the United States, they passed
Credible Fear Interview and diligen	atly attended U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcemen
("ICE") check-ins. However, they did	not receive notice of their master calendar hearing on
, and their absence resulted in	an <i>in absentia</i> removal order.

After learning of the removal order, Ms. promptly retained undersigned counsel and timely filed this motion. Rescission and reopening are warranted because Ms and failure to appear was due to exceptional circumstances—in particular, manipulation by a coercive U.S. citizen sponsor. Rescission and reopening are also warranted based on lack of notice. In the alternative, Ms. respectfully asks the Immigration Court to use its *sua sponte* authority to rescind and reopen their proceedings.

II. STATEMENT OF FACTS AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY



established a credible fear of persecution. *Id*.

While in detention, Ms. learned that she would need to find a sponsor in the United States in order for her and to be released from custody. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶ 8. ("Mr. She contacted a friend, "), hoping that he would sponsor them. *Id*. Mr. responded that he had Temporary Protected Status and that he believed this status would not allow him to sponsor them. *Id.* Wanting to help, Mr. asked a U.S. citizen colleague, ("Mr. "), to sponsor them instead. *Id.* Mr. agreed, and Ms. were released from detention in early November 2016. *Id.* at ¶¶ 9-10. Mr. told Ms. that she and would be living at , and she provided this address to ICE officers before leaving detention. *Id.* at ¶ 9. Upon their release from detention, Ms. and went to New York, New York to live with Mr. . *Id.* at ¶ 10. Upon arriving in New York, Mr. took Ms. and Queens, New York, instead of in Brooklyn, New York as they had refused to share the new address with Ms planned. *Id.* at ¶ 10. Mr. and she did not know how to determine the address on her own. *Id.* at ¶ 11. However, Mr. told Ms. that he received mail at and that he would give Ms. any mail from immigration that arrived at that address. *Id.* When Ms. mentioned updating her address with immigration officials, Mr. told her that she could not change her address once it was listed on her immigration paperwork; that he could get in trouble if she tried to change the address; and that she ought to listen to him because he was very important for her case. *Id.* at ¶¶ 12-14. Ms. was intimidated by Mr. and he convinced her that changing her address was the wrong thing to do for her case. *Id.* at ¶ 14.

Ms. dutifully complied with all ICE check-in requirements, both before and after the entry of the removal order. *Id.* at ¶¶ 15, 21; Exh. D, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Personal Report Record (hereinafter "Personal Report Record"). As she never heard anything from ICE about the status of her immigration case and never received any mail from the Immigration Court via Mr. , she was under the impression that she was doing everything required by immigration authorities. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶¶ 15, 19, 21.

In November of 2017, Ms. went to an immigration non-profit to get help with her case. *Id.* at ¶ 22. The non-profit told her that she had an *in absentia* removal order from a removal hearing held on *Id.*

Ms. immediately contacted Mr. and asked him why he did not inform her of her removal hearing. *Id.* at ¶ 23. Mr. told her that he never received any hearing notice. *Id.* Mr. then attempted to coerce Ms. into marrying him. *Id.* at ¶ 24. He told her that she could obtain legal status by marrying him and paying a fine to the government. *Id.* Feeling harassed, Ms. declined Mr. offer. *Id.*

Ms. then sought to hire a private attorney to represent her in reopening her case, but she could not afford the attorney's fee. *Id.* at ¶ 25. Still wanting to find a way to fight her case, Ms. sought help in an online community for asylum seekers. *Id.* at ¶ 26. Through the online community, Ms. became aware of the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project ("ASAP"), and was put into contact with an ASAP staff attorney. *Id.* In January of 2018, ASAP informed Ms. that the organization would represent her in a motion to reopen her case. *Id.*

III. ARGUMENT

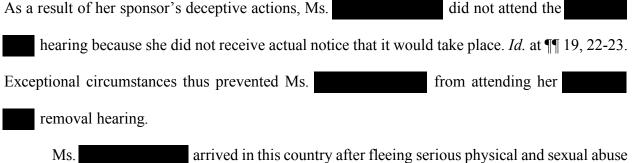
A. Ms. Case Should Be Reopened Because Exceptional Circumstances Prevented Her from Attending Her Removal Hearing

Ms. failed to appear at her master calendar hearing due to exceptional circumstances. As such, she moves this Court to rescind the *in absentia* order issued on that day and reopen these removal proceedings. *See* INA § 240(b)(5)(C)(i) (authorizing rescission of *in absentia* removal order "upon a motion to reopen filed within 180 days after the date of the order of removal or deportation if the alien demonstrates that the failure to appear was because of exceptional circumstances"). The applicable standard for determining exceptional circumstances is consideration of the totality of the circumstances. *Matter of W-F-*, 21 I&N. Dec. 503, 509 (BIA 1996).

In this case, the totality of the circumstances prove that Ms. was prevented from appearing at her removal hearing by exceptional circumstances. As such, she respectfully moves this Court to rescind the *in absentia* order issued on that day, and to reopen these removal proceedings.

1. Ms. exceptional circumstances caused by her exploitative and deceptive sponsor.

Ms. inability to update her address due to the coercive behavior of her sponsor is the same type of "exceptional circumstance" that the Board of Immigration Appeals ("BIA") and the Second Circuit have recognized in other cases. Her sponsor gave her the wrong address to provide to ICE, misled her into believing she should not update the address, promised to bring her any mail sent to the wrong address, and constantly overemphasized the significance of his role in her immigration case. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶¶ 9-16. In fact, her sponsor seems to have intentionally misled Ms.



Ms. arrived in this country after fleeing serious physical and sexual abuse in El Salvador. *Id.* at ¶¶ 1-7. Lacking resources, she found herself in an exploitative relationship, this time with a U.S citizen who held considerable control over her. *Id.* at ¶¶ 11-24, 27. Mr. —a U.S. citizen who had agreed to provide Ms. —and her daughter with much-needed housing—held an unequal amount of power in his relationship with Ms. —and he used this power to intimidate her and prevent her from being in control of her case. *Id.* Mr. — misled Ms. —in an attempt to coerce her into marrying him. *Id.* at ¶¶ 24, 27. Under a totality of the circumstances analysis, Ms. —was therefore faced with exceptional circumstances that prevented her from having her day in court. These circumstances prevented her from attending her — removal hearing despite her good faith efforts to comply with the Court's requirements.

The BIA has previously found "exceptional circumstances" that warrant granting a motion to reopen in several cases where respondents missed hearings as a result of the actions of third parties—precisely the situation Ms. found herself in. For example, in Exh. E, Jorge Alberto Batres-Romero, A206 189 330 (BIA March 17, 2016), the BIA accepted a former roommate's failure to tell respondent that hearing notice arrived in the mail as an exceptional circumstance. Similarly, in Exh. F, Karla de Jesus Alfaro-Martinez, A202 076 417 (BIA May 6, 2015), the BIA rescinded an in absentia order after considering the "totality of the circumstances," in a case where respondent's grandmother misplaced the hearing notice. In Exh. G, Adriana

Elizabeth Arevalo-Lopez, A098 121 311 (BIA June 14, 2016), the BIA granted a motion to reopen to a respondent who could not attend her hearing because her former boyfriend took her immigration documents. The Court should similarly reopen Ms. and her daughter's case because they missed their hearing due to a third party's actions, which were beyond their control.

The Second Circuit has also remanded a case for an IJ to consider whether an individual was entitled to rescission of an *in absentia* removal order where a third party lost the mail. *See Alrefae v. Chertoff*, 471 F.3d 353, 360 (2d Cir. 2006) (remanding and directing that the "IJ should assess [respondent]'s claim of exceptional circumstances independently of his claim of nonreceipt and explain whether [respondent] is entitled to rescission on this ground on the basis of his claim that he did not receive notice because his friend lost his mail. In doing so, the IJ may consider the totality of the circumstances.").

With regard to coercive sponsors, the BIA has found that when a respondent fails to attend a removal hearing after finding herself in a situation in which she is under the virtual control of a sponsor, this can be considered an "exceptional circumstance" that warrants granting a motion to reopen. Exh. H, *S-F-Z-M-*, AXXX-XXX-301 (BIA July 19, 2017). In *S-F-Z-M-*, the respondent was under the "virtual control" of others and was not allowed to access her mail. The BIA found that this difficult situation, combined with the respondent's "substantial claim for asylum," diligent pursuit of a motion to reopen, and consistent ICE reporting, constituted an "exceptional circumstance" under the totality of the circumstances standard.

Like the respondent in *S-F-Z-M-*, Ms. found herself under the virtual control of a U.S. citizen sponsor who did not allow her to access her mail. Additionally, like the respondent in *S-F-Z-M-*, Ms. has a strong asylum claim, diligently pursued a

motion to reopen, and complied with all ICE check-in requirements. Considering the totality of the circumstances in Ms. case, the Court should adopt the BIA's reasoning in *S-F-Z-M-* and find that exceptional circumstances prevented Ms. from attending her removal hearing.

2. Ms. strong asylum case, compliance with ICE reporting requirements, and diligence in attempting to reopen her case further demonstrate exceptional circumstances.

Moreover, Ms. has demonstrated exceptional circumstances under a totality of the circumstances analysis based on her strong asylum claim, compliance with all ICE reporting requirements, and diligence in attempting to reopen her case. The First Circuit has provided multiple factors relevant to assessing exceptional circumstances, including: the non-citizen's promptness in filing a motion to reopen, the strength of her underlying claim for relief, the harm she would suffer if the motion were denied, and the inconvenience to the government if the motion were granted. *Kaweesa v. Gonzales*, 450 F.3d 62, 68-69 (1st Cir. 2006) (citing *Matter of B-A-S*, 22 I.&N Dec. 57, 58-59 (BIA 1998)). In *Kaweesa*, the First Circuit held that an asylum applicant who mistakenly believed her hearing was scheduled four days after the actual date established exceptional circumstances because she was diligent in pursuing her legal case and faced potential harm if removed. *Id.* at 70. The First Circuit also found that it did not "appear that [Respondent's] failure to appear was deliberate or due to a desire to delay proceedings." *Id.* For these reasons, the First Circuit reversed the denial of the motion to reopen, and remanded for a hearing on the merits. *Id.* at 70-71.

Ms. _____ failure to appear was similarly far from deliberate, as she has worked diligently to comply with this country's rules and procedures. She fully intended to attend her removal hearing in order to present her strong case for relief from removal. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶

28. She has been violently beaten and raped by her husband, who is a member of the powerful gang and who has threatened her with death multiple times. *Id.* at ¶¶ 1-7. She therefore has a prima facie case for asylum under Matter of A-R-C-G, which held that a female victim of domestic violence may establish her membership in a "particular social group" by showing that, for religious, societal, cultural, legal, or other reasons, she was "unable to leave" the relationship with her husband. 26 I&N Dec. 388, 389 (BIA 2014). Furthermore, Ms. attended ICE check-ins both before and after the removal order was entered. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶¶ 15, 21; Exh. D, Personal Report Record. She also quickly sought out legal assistance and took steps to have her case reopened as soon as she found out that she missed her removal hearing. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶¶ 22-26. After being turned down by a non-profit, Ms. attempted to hire a private attorney to represent her in her case, demonstrating an interest in actively pursuing her asylum claim. *Id.* After realizing that she could not afford the help of a private attorney, Ms. took steps to find alternative representation. Id. In December of 2017, she became aware of the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) via an internet community for asylum seekers. Id. After reaching out to an ASAP representative, she learned in January of 2018 that ASAP would be able to represent her in her attempt to reopen her case and promptly filed the instant motion. *Id*.

For all of these reasons, the Court should find that Ms. missed her hearing due to exceptional circumstances.

B. Ms. Case Should Be Reopened Due to Lack of Notice

In the alternative, Ms. case should be reopened due to lack of notice, as she did not receive notice of her hearing. *Id.* at \P 22-23. An order of removal *in* absentia may be rescinded at any time upon a showing that the respondent did not receive notice

of the hearing at which they were ordered removed due to failure to appear. INA § 240(b)(5)(C)(ii). This court must consider "all relevant evidence submitted," including the respondent's own sworn declaration, in determining whether Ms. demonstrated she did not receive notice. Matter of M-R-A-, 24 I&N Dec. 665, 673 (BIA 2008). Although Ms. did not her sponsor claimed that he continued physically live at to check the mail at the Brooklyn address and that he did not receive notice from the Immigration . Exh. A, Decl. at ¶¶ 11, 23. Furthermore, Ms. Court of a hearing on has a strong underlying asylum case and has complied with other immigration requirements. Id. at ¶¶ 1-7, 15, 21; Exh. D, Personal Report Record. She thus had no "incentive" to miss her hearings in immigration court. *Matter of M-R-A-*, 24 I&N Dec. at 674. Had Ms. hearing, she would have attended the hearing to seek received notice of her asylum. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶ 28.

Ms. Imade a good faith effort to comply with all immigration requirements. When her sponsor told her she would be living at a different address than the one she had provided to ICE, she told him she wanted to update her address with immigration authorities. *Id.* at ¶ 11-12. Mr. Ithen intimidated her and gave her false information, leading her to believe that she both did not need to update her address and that updating her address might in fact harm her case. *Id.* at ¶ 12-14. The Second Circuit has found that individuals may be found to have received "constructive notice," even where they did not receive actual notice, if they "thwarted delivery" by failing to change their address when they knew the consequences of failing to do so. *Maghradze v. Gonzales*, 462 F.3d 150, 153-54 (2d Cir. 2006). However, this case is distinguishable from *Maghradze* because, due to her sponsor's deception, Ms. Idid not understand the importance of changing her address or the consequences of failing to do so. Instead, Ms.

followed Mr. 's instructions in an effort to receive mail from immigration authorities, rather than intentionally thwarting delivery of her hearing notice. Ms. was especially susceptible to misinformation and exploitation by Mr. because she lacked critical information regarding the importance and role of her sponsor in her immigration case. Mr. took advantage of this confusion. Due to her sponsor's deception, which undermined any information she may have received while in detention, the doctrine of constructive notice is inappropriate in this case. vulnerability to manipulation by her sponsor caused her to receive Ms. neither actual nor constructive notice of her hearing. The Fifth Circuit has directed the BIA to "give due consideration to the reality that many departed aliens are poor, uneducated, unskilled in the English language, and effectively unable to follow developments in the American legal system much less read and digest complicated legal decisions." Lugo-Resendez v. Lynch, 831 F.3d 337, 345 (5th Cir. 2016). This Court should give similar consideration to Ms. situation upon arrival in the United States. Ms. wanted to change her address but was prevented from doing so by her sponsor, who insisted that she keep the Brooklyn address on file. Exh. A. Decl. at ¶ 12-24. Based on her sponsor's misrepresentations, she believed he was essential to her immigration case, that he would check the mail at the address he gave, and that she was doing everything correctly. Id. An in absentia removal order is inappropriate in this case because Ms. did not receive actual or constructive notice of her hearing due to Mr. 's exploitation of Ms. vulnerable state. had every incentive to attend the hearing and In fact, Ms. pursue her strong claims for protection in the United States. Ms. actions and

her strong underlying asylum claim demonstrate that, had she been informed of the

hearing, she would have attended. In *Matter of M-R-A-*, the BIA held that the respondent was entitled to have his proceedings reopened after entry of an in absentia removal order where he submitted affidavits stating that he did not receive the notice, had filed an application for affirmative relief, had appeared at an earlier hearing, and exercised due diligence in promptly requesting reopening of proceedings. 24 I&N Dec. 665. Like the respondent in *Matter of M-R-A*-, Ms. seeks affirmative relief in the form of asylum, has complied with all ICE reporting requirements, and makes this prompt request to reopen proceedings. Exh. B, I-589; Exh. D, Personal Report Record. In fact, Ms. reported to ICE both before and after receiving the in absentia removal order. Exh. D, Personal Report Record. See also Exh. I, Eulalia Gaspar-Tomas, A206 462 892 (BIA June 22, 2017) (circumstantial evidence that respondents willingly presented themselves to ICE officers both "before and after their in absentia removal orders" and promptly retained counsel to request reopening supported a finding of lack of notice). has a colorable claim for asylum, as evidenced by her credible fear Ms. determination. Exh. C, CFI. She has every reason to attend her immigration court hearings in order to gain asylum and legal immigration status in the United States, and she would have attended her Immigration Court hearing had she received notice. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶ 28. And as soon as Ms. learned that she had a removal order, she diligently sought legal counsel and prepared this motion. *Id.* at \P 22-26. These factors support a finding that Ms. not receive actual or constructive notice of her immigration hearing.

Due process requires that a respondent be provided with notice of proceedings and an opportunity to be heard. *Matter of G-Y-R*, 23 I&N Dec. 181, 186 (BIA 2001) (citing *Landon v. Plasencia*, 459 U.S. 21, 32-33 (1982); *Bridges v. Wixon*, 326 U.S. 135, 154 (1945); *Kaoru Yamataya v. Fisher*, 189 U.S. 86, 101 (1903)). Because Ms.

notice, she respectfully requests that the *in absentia* removal order against her and her minor daughter be rescinded and their proceedings be reopened.

C. In the Alternative, Ms. Merits the Court's Exercise of Sua Sponte Authority to Rescind Her In Absentia Removal Order

Should the Court not be persuaded that this matter should be reopened due to exceptional circumstances or lack of notice, the Court should reopen these proceedings through an exercise of *sua sponte* authority. An Immigration Judge may reopen a proceeding in which he or she has made a decision at any time, unless jurisdiction is vested in the BIA. 8 C.F.R. § 1003.23(b)(1). The BIA has held that this *sua sponte* authority is "not meant to be used as a general cure for filing defects or to otherwise circumvent the regulations." *Matter of J- J-*, 21 I&N Dec. 976, 984 (BIA 1997). Instead, *sua sponte* authority is "an extraordinary remedy reserved for truly exceptional situations." *Matter of G- D-*, 22 I&N. Dec. 1132, 1134 (BIA 1999).

case is precisely the type of case in which sua sponte reopening is Ms. appropriate. Ms. was deemed by an Asylum Officer to have a credible fear of returning to El Salvador based on prior persecution on account of a protected ground. Exh. C, CFI. Her husband not only beat, raped, and threatened her while they were in a relationship, but he threatened to kill her and harm her family if she left the relationship. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶ 2-7; Exh. B, I-589; Exh. C, CFI. He also physically abused their six-year-old daughter, . Exh. A, Decl. intends to apply for asylum, withholding of removal, and relief under at ¶ 3. Ms. the Convention Against Torture ("CAT"), as evidenced by the enclosed I-589. Exh. B, I-589. She face serious harm and potential death if deported back to Mr. violent abuser and member of the gang who has attempted to kill Ms. before. Exh. A, Decl. at ¶¶ 2-7.

Ms. has done her best to pursue her asylum claim despite finding herself in an exploitative relationship with a manipulative U.S. citizen sponsor who, in an attempt to coerce her into marriage, took advantage of her lack of resources and ignorance of the complexities of U.S. immigration law and procedure. Despite finding herself in a confusing and frightening situation in an unfamiliar country, she diligently attended ICE check-ins both before and after receiving a removal order, and diligently worked to obtain legal representation in order to reopen her case and present her strong asylum claim. Ms. is not asking for a second bite at the apple. She is simply asking the Court to allow her case to be heard on the merits, so she can pursue her claim for asylum, withholding of removal, and protection under CAT for the first time.

Ms. respectfully asks the Court to consider the continuing danger that she and her daughter would face if returned to El Salvador and to conclude that she should be given a chance to present her claim for relief on its merits.

V. CONCLUSION

For all of the reasons stated above, the Ms.

Court to rescind the *in absentia* removal order that it entered against her and her minor daughter

on and to reopen their removal proceedings.

Respectfully submitted on this 315T day of January, 2018.



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW IMMIGRATION COURT NEW YORK, NY

In the Mat	ter of:)					
				File No. A			
)		File No. A			
Respondent	ts)					
	<u>ORI</u>	DER OF THE IMM	IIGRATION J	<u>UDGE</u>			
	DHS does not A response to Good cause ha The court agre	oppose the motion. the motion has not be seen established for established for established seen with the reasons seen established.	een filed with to the motion.	he court.			
Deadlines:	The application The respondent	n(s) for relief must b t must comply with	DHS biometric	s instructions by _			
Certificate of Service							
This docum	nent was served by	: [] Mail	[] Personal	Service			
To:	[] Alien	[] Alien c/o Custo	dial Officer	[] Atty/Rep	[] DHS		
Data:		Dv. Court	Stoff				

PROOF OF SERVICE

On January 31, 2018, I,	served a	сору	of the	foregoing	Motion	to Rescind
Removal Order and Reopen Proceedings in	person on	DHS/	ICE of	fice of Chi	ef Couns	sel at:

New York Office of Chief Counsel 26 Federal Plaza, Room 1130 New York, NY, 10278

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