NOTE

THE OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE NEXUS REQUIREMENT
AFTER ARTHUR ANDERSEN AND SARBANES-OXLEY

Kyle R. Taylor†

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† A.B., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2004; J.D. candidate, Cornell Law School, 2008; Managing Editor, Cornell Law Review, Volume 93. I would like to thank Professor Stephen P. Garvey for inspiring me to pursue this topic and Ben Carlisle, Emily Derr, Jonah Fecteau, and Ken Meyer for their excellent editing. I would especially like to thank Hilary Pinnington, my friends, and my family for their love, support, and good humor.
INTRODUCTION

With its May 31, 2005 decision in Arthur Andersen LLP v. United States,1 the Supreme Court, with one fell swoop, overturned the “poster-child case of all the corporate fraud cases.”2 When the dust settled, the result was an injured Department of Justice in one corner and approximately 28,000 lost Arthur Andersen jobs in the other.3 Partly responsible for this result, according to then-Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, was the “striking[ly] . . . little culpability the [jury] instructions required.”4 Not only did the trial court improperly instruct the jury on the meaning of “corruptly”—the statutory mens rea requirement for the crime—the instructions also “led the jury to believe that it did not have to find any nexus between the ‘persua[sion]’ to destroy documents and any particular proceeding.”5 Although the Court clearly indicated that the government must prove some sort of “nexus” between the defendant’s acts and the allegedly obstructed judicial proceeding to convict a defendant in a witness tampering prosecution, the Court ultimately failed to explain exactly what that nexus would entail.6

The federal criminal statutes pertaining to obstruction of justice are codified at 18 U.S.C. §§ 1501–1520.8 Section 1503, the “Omnibus Clause,”9 is the general obstruction of justice provision, which prohibits obstruction of justice toward judicial officers, grand and petit jurors, and witnesses.10 The witness tampering provisions of the obstruction statutes are broadly codified under § 1512,11 with the provisions at issue in Arthur Andersen found in § 1512(b)(2)(A) and (B).12 The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 added §§ 1512(c) and 1519, and in-

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2 Charles Lane, Justices Overturn Andersen Conviction: Advice to Enron Jury on Accountants’ Intent Is Faulted, WASH. POST, June 1, 2005, at A1 (quoting William B. Mateja, former member of the corporate fraud task force of the Department of Justice).
3 See id. (explaining that as of June 1, 2005, Arthur Andersen employed “a staff of only 200 left out of the 28,000 people who once worked there”).
4 Arthur Andersen, 544 U.S. at 706.
5 See id. at 706–07.
6 Id. at 707 (alteration in original).
7 See id. at 707–08 (affirming the “nexus” requirement without further explanation or guidance).
9 See United States v. Wood, 6 F.3d 692, 695 (10th Cir. 1993).
10 See 18 U.S.C. § 1503 (2000) (“Whoever corruptly . . . influences, obstructs, or impedes, or endeavors to influence, obstruct, or impede, the due administration of justice, shall be punished . . . .”).
12 Id. § 1512(b)(2)(A), (B) (2000); Arthur Andersen, 544 U.S. at 698. The statute at issue in Arthur Andersen states:

Supreme Court decisions have struggled to define the contours of the broad language of the § 1503 Omnibus Clause. One such case, \textit{United States v. Aguilar}, recognized the need to “place metes and bounds on the very broad language of the catchall provision.”\footnote{United States v. Aguilar, 515 U.S. 593, 599 (1995).} In \textit{Aguilar}, a case involving false disclosures during a grand-jury investigation, the Court considered, among other things, the necessary connection between the defendant’s action and the allegedly obstructed judicial proceedings.\footnote{See id. at 599–600.} Specifically, the Court held that the defendant’s act must have a “nexus” with the judicial proceedings or the “natural and probable effect of interfering with the due administration of justice.”\footnote{Id. at 599 (quoting United States v. Wood, 6 F.3d 692, 695 (10th Cir. 1993)).} Unfortunately, the Court did not specify whether and how the nexus requirement would apply to witness tampering cases.\footnote{See Arthur Andersen, 544 U.S. at 707–08.}

\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textbf{(b)}] Whoever knowingly uses intimidation, threatens, or corruptly persuades another person, or attempts to do so, or engages in misleading conduct toward another person, with intent to—\ldots
  \item [\textbf{(2)}] cause or induce any person to—
    \begin{itemize}
      \item [(\textbf{A})] withhold testimony, or withhold a record, document, or other object, from an official proceeding;
      \item [(\textbf{B})] alter, destroy, mutilate, or conceal an object with intent to impair the object’s integrity or availability for use in an official proceeding;\ldots
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both.
\end{itemize}

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\textsection{1512}(b)(2)(A), (B).

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\textsection{1512}(b)(2)(A), (B.)
When Arthur Andersen came before the Court, the issue of applying the nexus requirement to witness tampering cases remained unresolved. The Court did offer slightly more guidance in that case, however, by holding that the § 1512 witness tampering jury instructions were faulty in part due to a lack of “any type of nexus element.” 18 Although the Court discussed the Aguilar holding, 19 it neglected to clarify precisely how the nexus requirement would apply to witness tampering—as opposed to general obstruction of justice—cases. 20

As the Court’s “any type of nexus element” 21 language implies, there are many possible readings of what “nexus” might be required—the “type” of nexus at issue is not always clear, as proved especially true in Arthur Andersen. Courts tend to broadly define “nexus” as requiring “knowledge of a pending proceeding” or as requiring that the defendant’s act have the “natural and probable effect” of interfering with a pending proceeding. 22 Unlocking the intricacies of these broad definitions of the “nexus requirement” is a necessary step in determining what the Arthur Andersen Court meant in its application of “nexus” to witness tampering cases.

Although the circuit courts of appeals appear to agree that Arthur Andersen does require a “nexus,” 23 they have remained unhelpful in clarifying the meaning of the concept. The Eleventh Circuit, without elaborating, has simply restated the Arthur Andersen holding. 24 When faced with this issue, the Second Circuit declined to answer the question by finding that it was not at issue. 25 The First Circuit has gone slightly further by pointing out that Arthur Andersen did not address whether the nexus requirement applies to § 1512 with the same force as to § 1503. 26 The Third and Seventh Circuits have gone even further by discussing jury instructions that they found to satisfy the Arthur

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18 Id. at 707.
19 See id. at 708 (acknowledging that the Court in Aguilar “held that § 1503 required something more—specifically, a ‘nexus’ between the obstractive act and the proceeding” (citation omitted)).
20 See id. at 707–08.
21 Id. at 707.
23 See, e.g., United States v. Starks, 472 F.3d 466, 469–70 (7th Cir. 2006); United States v. Ronda, 455 F.3d 1273, 1284–88 (11th Cir. 2006); United States v. Vampire Nation, 451 F.3d 189, 205 (3d Cir. 2006); United States v. Darif, 446 F.3d 701, 711 (7th Cir. 2006); United States v. Quattrone, 441 F.3d 153, 170–71, 176 (2d Cir. 2006); United States v. Byrne, 435 F.3d 16, 23–25 (1st Cir. 2006).
24 See Ronda, 455 F.3d at 1287–88 (noting that Arthur Andersen required that “the acts of obstruction relate to ‘an official proceeding’” but holding that the nexus requirement does not apply with equal force to § 1512(b)(3) (citing Byrne, 435 F.3d at 24)).
25 See Quattrone, 441 F.3d at 176 n.22 (“The question of whether the nexus requirement applies in the same way to section 1512(b) as it does to sections 1503 and 1505 is not relevant to resolution of this appeal.”).
26 See Byrne, 435 F.3d at 25 (“[T]he Arthur Andersen court did not elaborate on the particularity required by the nexus requirement in subsection (b)(2).”).
Andersen nexus requirement. Thus, although some of the courts of appeals have addressed this issue, none have provided concrete guidance to resolve it.

However the Arthur Andersen Court intended to define the nexus requirement, it is necessary to consider the importance of that decision in the first place. The decision reminded one commentator of the Woody Allen line that “[s]ex without love is an empty experience . . . but as empty experiences go, it’s one of the best.” John Hasnas argues that the passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002 rendered the Arthur Andersen decision essentially meaningless. At the same time, Hasnas asserts that despite this meaninglessness, the case significantly demonstrates the Court’s intent to rein in prosecutorial discretion. Although the addition of §§ 1512(c) and 1519 by Sarbanes-Oxley seem to provide prosecutors with “greater power, lower requirements of proof, and increased penalties,” they remain fresh statutes that do not provide the certainty of § 1512(b), especially given the holding in Arthur Andersen. It remains to be seen whether Sarbanes-Oxley will render § 1512(b) “a dead letter.”

This Note examines the Aguilar obstruction of justice nexus requirement as applied to witness tampering and document destruction statutes in the wake of Arthur Andersen and Sarbanes-Oxley. In particular, this Note analyzes the Court’s implicit intention in both Aguilar and Arthur Andersen to apply stricter constraints on prosecutors and courts that confront document destruction cases. Part I outlines the relevant obstruction of justice, witness tampering, and document destruction statutes. Part II begins by examining the Court’s use of the nexus requirement—particularly in the context of its holdings in Aguilar and Arthur Andersen—and then considers subsequent opinions by the courts of appeals that have discussed the nexus requirement in light of the Arthur Andersen holding. Part III investigates subsequent case law and commentary surrounding the nexus requirement, along with relevant constitutional and practical considerations. The Note

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27 See Vampire Nation, 451 F.3d at 205 (finding no plain error in jury instructions under Arthur Andersen where trial court instructed the jury “that [the defendant] could be found guilty of witness tampering only if he acted with the specific intent to induce [another person] to withhold evidence from an official proceeding”); Darif, 446 F.3d at 712 (finding jury instructions sufficient because they made “clear to the jury that the witness tampering charge was related to ‘a particular proceeding’”); see also Starks, 472 F.3d at 469–70 (implicitly acknowledging that Arthur Andersen requires a nexus).


30 See Hasnas, supra note 28, at 192–94.

31 See id. at 194–212.

32 Id. at 194.

33 Id.
concludes that the best reading of Aguilar and Arthur Andersen requires strict application of the nexus element—that the defendant’s act have the “natural and probable effect” of interfering with a pending proceeding—to § 1512(b) and Sarbanes-Oxley document destruction prosecutions.

I

OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE, WITNESS TAMPERING, AND DOCUMENT DESTRUCTION: STATUTORY LAW

A. The Omnibus Clause

Obstruction of justice is “[i]nterference with the orderly administration of law and justice, as by giving false information to or withholding evidence from a police officer or prosecutor, or by harming or intimidating a witness or juror.” The federal obstruction of justice criminal statutes are located in Title Eighteen of the United States Code, §§ 1501–1520. The more important obstruction of justice provisions include the definitions section and the Omnibus Clause, as well as provisions dealing with obstruction of proceedings before departments, agencies, and committees; obstruction of criminal investigations; witness tampering; and retaliating against a witness, victim, or an informant. The Omnibus Clause of § 1503 serves as the general obstruction of justice statute, while § 1512 has traditionally served as the general witness tampering statute.

Section 1503(a) is codified under the broad heading of “[i]nfluencing or injuring officer or juror generally” and applies in two ways. The first part of § 1503(a) proscribes any effort to corruptly influence, or to influence by threats or force, any grand juror, petit juror, or court officer. The second part, the Omnibus Clause, broadly protects the “due administration of justice.”
A number of the circuit courts of appeals have held that the restrictive language preceding the Omnibus Clause does not limit its general language.\textsuperscript{42} Rather, the Omnibus Clause proscribes an extensive class of conduct that interferes with the judicial process.\textsuperscript{43} In 1995, the Supreme Court held that the Omnibus Clause is essentially a "catchall . . . . far more general in scope than the earlier clauses of the statute."\textsuperscript{44} The Court has placed some limits on the Omnibus Clause, however, by holding that the obstructive conduct must have the "natural and probable" effect of interfering with the due administration of justice.\textsuperscript{45}

The Omnibus Clause of § 1503 provides that "[w]hoever corruptly . . . influences, obstructs, or impedes, or endeavors to influence, obstruct, or impede, the due administration of justice, shall be punished."\textsuperscript{46} The mens rea required to violate the Omnibus Clause is "corruptly."\textsuperscript{47} A defendant may satisfy the actus reus element of the crime by "influenc[ing], obstruct[ing], or imped[ing], or endeavor[ing] to influence, obstruct, or impede."\textsuperscript{48} Finally, the result element involves obstruction of the "due administration of justice."\textsuperscript{49} In any case other than a killing or an attempted killing, § 1503 calls for "imprisonment for not more than 10 years, a fine . . . , or both."\textsuperscript{50}

Conviction under § 1503 requires pendency of a judicial proceeding\textsuperscript{51} and some connection between the obstruction of a government investigation or official proceeding and the pending judicial proceed-

\textsuperscript{43} Id. (citing United States v. Thomas, 916 F.2d 647, 650 (11th Cir. 1990) ("any [corrupt] act" which obstructs justice); United States v. Griffin, 589 F.2d 200, 205–06 (5th Cir. 1979) (false testimony to a grand jury); United States v. Howard, 569 F.2d 1331, 1333–35 (5th Cir. 1978) (coercion of judge to disclose secret grand jury testimony); United States v. Walasek, 527 F.2d 676, 679–81 (3d Cir. 1975) (destruction of evidence for grand jury investigation)).
\textsuperscript{44} United States v. Aguilar, 515 U.S. 593, 598 (1995). Before the Supreme Court’s decision in Aguilar, the Ninth Circuit applied the canon of statutory construction of ejusdem generis in interpreting the Omnibus Clause to proscribe only acts similar to those that the restrictive language of the first clause of § 1503(a) prohibited. See United States v. Aguilar, 21 F.3d 1475, 1486 n.9 (9th Cir. 1994), rev’d, 515 U.S. 593 (1995). Ejusdem generis provides that "when a general word or phrase follows a list of specifics, the general word or phrase will be interpreted to include only items of the same type as those listed." BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 556 (8th ed. 2004).
\textsuperscript{45} Aguilar, 515 U.S. at 599; see Rafferty & Teperow, supra note 42, at 992.
\textsuperscript{46} § 1503(a).
\textsuperscript{47} Id.
\textsuperscript{48} Id.
\textsuperscript{49} Id.
\textsuperscript{50} Id. § 1503(b).
\textsuperscript{51} See, e.g., United States v. Mullins, 22 F.3d 1365, 1370 (6th Cir. 1994); United States v. Nelson, 852 F.2d 706, 709 (3d Cir. 1988); United States v. Reed, 773 F.2d 477, 485 (2d Cir. 1985); United States v. McComb, 744 F.2d 555, 560 (7th Cir. 1984).
Moreover, a pending investigation by a grand jury constitutes a judicial proceeding under § 1503. The temporal determination of the point at which a proceeding becomes “pending” has varied throughout the circuits.

Other elements of a § 1503 violation include a knowledge requirement and a “nexus” requirement. To establish a § 1503 violation, the government must prove that the defendant knew of the pending judicial proceeding. Lack of knowledge of a pending judicial proceeding would indicate that the requisite intent to obstruct justice is also absent. In addition, the intent element of § 1503 includes a “nexus” element requiring that “the act . . . have a relationship in time, causation, or logic with the judicial proceedings. In other words, the endeavor must have the ‘natural and probable effect’ of interfering with the due administration of justice.”

Before the Court’s decision in Arthur Andersen, the courts of appeals employed varying definitions of the term “corruptly.”


The First, Fifth, and Eleventh Circuits defined “corruptly” as requiring, at least in part, a corrupt motive. See, e.g., United States v. Barfield, 999 F.2d 1520, 1524 (11th Cir. 1993); United States v. Thomas, 916 F.2d 647, 651 (11th Cir. 1990); Cintolo, 818 F.2d at 991–92; United States v. Howard, 569 F.2d 1331, 1336 n.9 (5th Cir. 1978). Other circuits had held that “corruptly” simply meant that the act must have been “done with the purpose of obstructing justice.” United States v. Rasheed, 663 F.2d 843, 852 (9th Cir. 1981); see also United States v. Machi, 811 F.2d 991, 996 (7th Cir. 1987) (approving a jury instruction that
though the Court in Arthur Andersen was construing the meaning of “knowingly . . . corruptly persuad[e]” under § 1512(b), it nevertheless clarified the meaning of “corrupt” and “corruptly” as “normally associated with wrongful, immoral, depraved, or evil.” Moreover, actual obstruction is not necessary to sustain a § 1503 conviction; a mere “endeavor” to obstruct justice is sufficient. Courts have defined “endeavor” in this context as “any effort or essay to accomplish the evil purpose that the [statute] was enacted to prevent.”

B. Witness Tampering

Despite the § 1503 Omnibus Clause and its broad applicability, both Congress and prosecutors realized that protection for witness tampering victims remained deficient. Congress found that the statutory construction of § 1503 was problematic because it offered limited protection and forced prosecutors to satisfy difficult threshold requirements. Among other problems, Congress noted that § 1503 only protected witnesses rather than other persons who might be involved in a judicial proceeding—including victims and individuals not called as active witnesses. Furthermore, Congress understood that the threshold requirements of § 1503, such as the requirement that a pending judicial proceeding exist at the time that the defendant acted, essentially provided easy means for a defendant to escape prosecution. The passage of the Victim and Witness Protection Act of 1982, codified as 18 U.S.C. § 1512, led one commentator to state

to act “corruptly” means “to act with the purpose of obstructing justice”); United States v. Jeter, 775 F.2d 670, 679 (6th Cir. 1985) (same).

60 Id. at 705.
that “[u]nder § 1503 Congress provided only an ax to fight witness tampering, but under § 1512 it gave prosecutors a scalpel.”

Witness tampering is “[t]he act or an instance of obstructing justice by intimidating, influencing, or harassing a witness before or after the witness testifies.” The federal witness tampering provisions are generally codified under § 1512 as “[t]ampering with a witness, victim, or an informant.” Section 1512(a) criminalizes witness tampering with the threat or use of violence. Section 1512(b), the provision that the government has traditionally used to prosecute document destruction cases, applies to “[w]hoever knowingly uses intimidation, threatens, or corruptly persuades another person, or attempts to do so, or engages in misleading conduct toward another person.” Section 1512(c) is the Sarbanes-Oxley Act addition to witness tampering law and mainly applies to document destruction cases. Section 1512(d) criminalizes the actions of “[w]hoever intentionally harasses another person and thereby hinders, delays, prevents, or dissuades any person from” appearing before an official proceeding, law enforcement officer, or United States judge. The sections following § 1512(d) act as modifiers to § 1512 and do not add separate substantive crimes.

Congress intended § 1512(b) to apply to noncoercive—in addition to coercive—witness tampering cases and, thus, included the term “corruptly.” To obtain a conviction for noncoercive witness tampering under § 1512(b), the government must prove that the defendant (a) knowingly, (b) corruptly persuaded or attempted to do so, or engaged in misleading conduct, (c) toward another person, and

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68 See Haney, supra note 63, at 64.
69 BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 1634 (8th ed. 2004).
71 See id. § 1512(a)(1) (covering the acts of “[w]hoever kills or attempts to kill another person”); id. § 1512(a)(2) (covering the acts of “[w]hoever uses physical force or the threat of physical force against any person, or attempts to do so”); id. § 1512(a)(3) (setting forth punishments).
73 § 1512(b).
75 See § 1512(c).
76 Id. § 1512(d).
77 See id. § 1512(c) (affirmative defense); id. § 1512(f) (pendency of official proceeding and admissibility of objects); id. § 1512(g) (state of mind); id. § 1512(h) (extraterritorial federal jurisdiction); id. § 1512(i) (jurisdictional venue); id. § 1512(j) (maximum term of imprisonment). But see id. § 1512(k) (dealing with conspiracy).
78 See id. § 1512(b); see also Richard M. Strassberg & Roberto M. Braceras, ‘Corruptly Persuading’ the Obstruction of Justice, 16 WHITE-COLLAR CRIME REP., May 2002, at 1, 4 (discussing the history of § 1512 and its amendment to include language targeting noncoercive witness tampering).
(d) with the intent that the other person should act to obstruct justice.\textsuperscript{79} In addition, § 1512(b)(3), which applies to obstructing the communication of certain information to government officials, does not include the “official proceeding” requirement.\textsuperscript{80} Section 1512(b)(2)(A) and (B) have been the traditional subsections under which the government has prosecuted witness tampering cases.\textsuperscript{81}

The Sarbanes-Oxley Act added § 1512(c) to the government’s witness tampering arsenal in response to the recent corporate document destruction scandals.\textsuperscript{82} Some commentators suggest that § 1512(c) will become the Omnibus Clause equivalent in witness tampering prosecution.\textsuperscript{83} Section 1512(c) affords the government several advantages in prosecuting a document destruction case: (1) it does not require the government to pursue the “persuader” to obtain a conviction; (2) it does not require that the perpetrator act “knowingly” in addition to “corruptly”; and (3) it carries twice the maximum penalty of § 1512(b).\textsuperscript{84}

C. Document Destruction Under § 1519

The Sarbanes-Oxley addition of § 1519\textsuperscript{85} subjects

\begin{quote}
whoever knowingly alters, destroys, mutilates, conceals, covers up, falsifies, or makes a false entry in any record, document, or tangible object with the intent to impede, obstruct, or influence the investigation or proper administration of any matter within the jurisdiction of any department or agency of the United States . . . or in relation to or contemplation of any such matter to up to twenty years’ imprisonment.\textsuperscript{86} Section 1519—along with § 1512(c)—will provide a very useful tool for prosecutors in the future.\textsuperscript{87} Section 1519 does not require that the defendant act “corruptly,” but merely that the defendant “knowingly” destroy documents with intent to hamper a federal investigation.\textsuperscript{88} Moreover, § 1519 requires only that the defendant engage in document destruction “in

\textsuperscript{79} See § 1512(b).
\textsuperscript{80} See id. § 1512(b)(3).
\textsuperscript{83} See Hasnas, supra note 28, at 193; Julie R. O’Sullivan, The Federal Criminal “Code” Is a Disgrace: Obstruction Statutes as Case Study, 96 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 643, 685 (2006) (“It added a new omnibus provision, § 1512(c)(2), which mimics in major part § 1503’s omnibus clause but is applicable in contexts outside of the judicial proceedings that § 1503 protects, such as in proceedings before federal agencies and in congressional inquiries.”).
\textsuperscript{84} See § 1512(c); Hasnas, supra note 28, at 193.
\textsuperscript{86} See § 1519 (Supp. IV 2004).
\textsuperscript{87} See Hasnas, supra note 28, at 194.
\textsuperscript{88} See § 1519; Hasnas, supra note 28, at 194.
. . . contemplation of an official proceeding. This appears to demonstrate congressional intent to avoid a "pending proceeding" requirement.

II

OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE CASES AND THE NEXUS REQUIREMENT

A. The Nexus Requirement and United States v. Aguilar

In July 1987, Michael Rudy Tham sought post-conviction relief from a federal court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to set aside his embezzlement conviction. Tham asked Edward Solomon and Abraham Chalupowiz (Abe Chapman) to assist him by talking to a Northern District of California judge not assigned to the case, Judge Robert Aguilar. Solomon and Chapman met with Aguilar, and Aguilar spoke with the assigned judge, Judge Stanley Weigel, about the matter.

In addition to the embezzlement conviction, the FBI had identified Tham as a suspect in a labor racketeering investigation. Chief District Judge Robert Peckham authorized the FBI to install a wiretap on Tham’s business phones, and the application included Chapman as a potential interceptee. After the FBI informed Chief Judge Peckham of the meetings between Chapman and Aguilar, the Chief Judge advised Aguilar that Chapman might have criminal connections because his name had appeared on the wiretap authorization.

Five months after learning of the wiretap authorization, Aguilar noticed a man observing his home during a visit with Chapman. Aguilar informed his nephew of the home surveillance and the wiretapping of Chapman’s phone with the intention that his nephew would pass along the message to Chapman. Aguilar mistakenly believed that the wiretap stemmed from the original application, but

89 See § 1519; Hasnas, supra note 28, at 194.
90 See Hill, supra note 72, at 1539.
91 United States v. Aguilar, 515 U.S. 593, 595 (1995) (explaining that Tham was convicted of embezzling funds from the local affiliate of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters).
92 Id.
93 Id. at 595–96. Aguilar knew Chapman through a distant marriage relation and knew Solomon through law school. Id. at 595.
94 Id. at 595–96.
95 Id. at 596.
96 Id. (observing that the FBI applied for the wiretap on April 20, 1987, the 30-day wiretap expired on May 20, 1987, and Chief Judge Peckham maintained the secrecy of the wiretap following a showing of good cause).
97 Id.
98 Id.
99 Id.
Chief Judge Peckham had separately authorized another wiretap application, beginning in October 1987.\footnote{100} Eventually, a grand jury began investigating an alleged conspiracy to influence Tham’s habeas case.\footnote{101} During the investigation, two FBI agents questioned Aguilar,\footnote{102} but he lied about his role in the Tham case and his knowledge of the wiretap.\footnote{103} The grand jury indicted Aguilar, and a jury found him guilty of disclosing a wiretap, violating 18 U.S.C. § 2232(c), and endeavoring to obstruct the due administration of justice, violating 18 U.S.C. § 1503.\footnote{104} A Ninth Circuit panel affirmed the § 2232(c) conviction and reversed the § 1503 conviction.\footnote{105} Later, the Ninth Circuit reversed both convictions on rehearing en banc,\footnote{106} reasoning that Aguilar had not interfered with a pending judicial proceeding under § 1503.\footnote{107}

On review, the Supreme Court considered whether the Omnibus Clause of § 1503 may punish mere false statements to potential grand jury witnesses.\footnote{108} The Court examined its decision in Pettibone v. United States,\footnote{110} which held that “a person is not sufficiently charged with obstructing or impeding the due administration of justice in a court unless it appears that he knew or had notice that justice was being administered in such court.”\footnote{111} The Aguilar Court proceeded to note that courts of appeals cases had placed “metes and bounds” on the broad “catchall provision.”\footnote{112} The Court then held that a nexus requirement applied to § 1503—that the “endeavor must have the ‘natural and probable effect’ of interfering with the due administration of justice.”\footnote{113} Therefore, if the “defendant lacks knowledge that his actions are likely to affect the judicial proceeding, he lacks the requisite intent to obstruct.”\footnote{114}

\footnote{100} Id.
\footnote{101} Id. at 596–97.
\footnote{102} Id. at 597.
\footnote{103} Id.
\footnote{104} Id. Aguilar received a sentence of two concurrent six-month terms of imprisonment and a fine of $2,000. United States v. Aguilar, 21 F.3d 1475, 1477 (9th Cir. 1994), rev’d, 515 U.S. 593 (1995).
\footnote{105} Aguilar, 515 U.S. at 597.
\footnote{106} Id.; Aguilar, 21 F.3d at 1476–77.
\footnote{107} Aguilar, 515 U.S. at 597.
\footnote{108} Id. at 595.
\footnote{109} See id. at 599.
\footnote{110} 148 U.S. 197 (1893).
\footnote{111} Id. at 206. The Court in Pettibone reasoned that a person lacking knowledge of a pending proceeding necessarily cannot have the evil intent to obstruct. Id. at 206–07.
\footnote{112} See Aguilar, 515 U.S. at 599.
\footnote{113} Id. (quoting United States v. Wood, 6 F.3d 692, 695 (10th Cir. 1993)); United States v. Thomas, 916 F.2d 647, 651 (11th Cir. 1990).
\footnote{114} Aguilar, 515 U.S. at 599. The Court declined to address Aguilar’s various other arguments on the basis that the “‘nexus’ requirement developed in the decisions of the Courts of Appeals is a correct construction of § 1503.” Id. at 600.
B. *Arthur Andersen LLP v. United States*

Aggressive accounting practices and rapid growth accompanied Enron Corporation’s shift in business focus from natural gas to energy. At the time, Enron entrusted Arthur Andersen LLP with the responsibility of auditing Enron’s public financial statements. Enron’s declining financial performance began in 2000 and continued through 2001. Jeffrey Skilling, Enron’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO), resigned suddenly in August 2001, and Enron reappointed Kenneth Lay as his successor. Soon after, a senior Enron accountant informed Lay and Arthur Andersen partner Michael Odom of the potential accounting scandals looming over Enron.

On August 28, 2001, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) opened an informal investigation into Enron’s alleged improprieties. Arthur Andersen reacted by forming an Enron “crisis-response” team, which included in-house counsel Nancy Temple, and retained outside counsel for any potential Enron-related litigation. Temple’s notes from an in-house counsel meeting indicated that “some SEC investigation” ‘highly probable.’

In October 2001, Odom spoke at a general training meeting and urged all employees to comply with Arthur Andersen’s document retention policy. Meanwhile, Temple designated the type of potential claim for the Enron matter as “Professional Practice—Government/Regulatory Inv[estigation]” and e-mailed Odom to suggest that he remind the crisis-response team of the document retention policy.

After Enron announced its third quarter results in October 2001, the SEC notified the company that it had commenced an informal investigation in August. The SEC’s letter also requested “certain

116 Id.
117 Id. at 699. Arthur Andersen also became embattled in its own right. In June 2001, the firm executed a settlement agreement with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) which carried a large fine. In addition, the SEC also censured the firm and enjoined it from committing further securities violations. Then, in July 2001, the SEC named a lead audit partner in an amended complaint alleging improprieties by Sunbeam Corporation. Id. at 699 n.2.
118 Id. at 699.
119 Id.
120 Id. (noting that the informal investigation followed a Wall Street Journal article suggesting improprieties at Enron).
121 Id.
122 Id. (citation omitted).
123 Id. at 699–700.
124 Id. at 700.
125 Id.
126 Id.
information and documents.”127 On October 19, Enron forwarded a copy of the letter to Arthur Andersen.128 The following day, Temple instructed the crisis-response team to continue to follow the document retention policy.129 David Duncan, the leader of Arthur Andersen’s Enron crisis-response team,130 reminded certain Arthur Andersen partners of the document retention policy following Enron CEO Kenneth Lay’s refusal to answer analysts’ questions due to “potential lawsuits, as well as the SEC inquiry.”131 Duncan later distributed the policy at a crisis-response team meeting.132

On October 26, an unnamed Arthur Andersen partner distributed a New York Times article discussing the SEC’s Enron investigation.133 The partner commented via e-mail that “the problems are just beginning and [Arthur Andersen] will be in the cross hairs.”134 Days later, on October 30, the SEC began a formal investigation and requested accounting documents from Enron.135

On November 8, the SEC served Enron and Arthur Andersen with subpoenas to obtain records.136 The next day, Duncan’s secretary distributed an e-mail stating, “Per Dave—No more shredding... We have been officially served for our documents.”137 Less than a month later, Enron filed for bankruptcy.138 Arthur Andersen later fired Duncan, who pleaded guilty to witness tampering.139

The indictment against Arthur Andersen in March 2002—charging one count of violating 18 U.S.C. § 1512(b)(2)(A) and (B)—alleged that the petitioner “did knowingly, intentionally and corruptly persuade... other persons, to wit: [Arthur Andersen] employees, with intent to cause’ them to withhold documents from, and alter documents for use in, ‘official proceedings, namely: regulatory and criminal proceedings and investigations.’”140 The jury returned a guilty verdict.141 The Fifth Circuit affirmed, holding that the district court properly instructed the jury on the meaning of “corruptly persuades”

127 Id.
128 Id.
129 Id. at 701.
130 See id. at 698–99.
131 Id. at 698–99, 701.
132 Id. at 701.
133 Id.
134 Id.
135 Id.
136 Id. at 702.
137 Id. (omission in original).
138 Id.
139 Id.
140 Id. (omission in original).
141 Id.
and “official proceeding” and that the jury did not need to find any consciousness of wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{142}

On review, the Supreme Court analyzed what it means to “‘knowingly . . . corruptly persuad[e]’ another person ‘with intent to . . . cause’ that person to ‘withhold’ documents from, or ‘alter’ documents for use in, an ‘official proceeding.’”\textsuperscript{143} The Court found that “[o]nly persons conscious of wrongdoing can . . . ‘knowingly . . . corruptly persuad[e].’”\textsuperscript{144} Therefore, the Court held that the “jury instructions at issue . . . failed to convey the requisite consciousness of wrongdoing.”\textsuperscript{145}

Although the Court ostensibly limited its holding to the district court’s error in instructing the jury on the meaning of “knowingly . . . corruptly persuade,” the Court proceeded to discuss the lack of any nexus requirement in the instructions.\textsuperscript{146} The Court noted that the instructions “led the jury to believe that it did not have to find any nexus between the ‘persuasion’ to destroy documents and any particular proceeding.”\textsuperscript{147} The Court stated that a “‘knowingly . . . corruptly persuade[r]’ cannot be someone who persuades others to shred documents under a document retention policy when he does not have in contemplation any particular official proceeding in which those documents might be material.”\textsuperscript{148} The Court reached this conclusion despite the language in the current version of § 1512(f)(1)

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{142} Id.
\textsuperscript{143} Id. at 703 (alteration in original) (omission in original).
\textsuperscript{144} Id. at 706 (second alteration in original) (second omission in original).
\textsuperscript{145} Id.
\textsuperscript{146} See id. at 707–08. The district court charged the jury, in part:
[T]o determine whether Andersen corruptly persuaded “another person,” an employee or partner of Andersen is considered “another person.” To “persuade” is to engage in any non-coercive attempt to induce another person to engage in certain conduct. The word “corruptly” means having an improper purpose. An improper purpose, for this case, is an intent to subvert, undermine, or impede the fact-finding ability of an official proceeding. In order to establish this corrupt persuasion element, the government must prove that the agent of Andersen who engaged in the persuasion, not the other person persuaded, possessed the improper purpose. The improper purpose need not be the sole motivation for the defendant’s conduct so long as the defendant acted, at least in part, with that improper purpose.

Thus, if you find beyond a reasonable doubt that an agent, such as a partner, of Andersen acting within the scope of his or her employment, induced or attempted to induce another employee or partner of the firm or some other person to withhold, alter, destroy, mutilate, or conceal an object, and that the agent did so with the intent, at least in part, to subvert, undermine, or impede the fact-finding ability of an official proceeding, then you may find that Andersen committed [an element of the charged offense.]

Court’s Instructions to the Jury, Arthur Andersen LLP, Cr. No. H-02-121, reprinted in O’Sullivan, supra note 83, at 694–95 (alterations in original).

\textsuperscript{147} Arthur Andersen, 544 U.S. at 707 (alteration in original).
\textsuperscript{148} Id. at 708 (alterations in original) (omission in original).
\end{small}
providing that an official proceeding “need not be pending or about to be instituted at the time of the offense” for prosecution under § 1512.\textsuperscript{149}

The Court’s nexus discussion was not strictly a part of its holding, but the Court clearly sought to require some sort of nexus in witness tampering cases. The specific nature of the nexus requirement, however, remains less clear. The Court could mean (1) that nexus requires “knowledge of a pending proceeding,” (2) that nexus requires knowledge of a nexus, or (3) that the allegedly obstructive act must have the “‘natural and probable effect’ of interfering with the due administration of justice.”\textsuperscript{150}

C. Post-

Arthur Andersen Nexus Requirement Cases

1. United States v. Ronda

Seven former police officers were convicted in a U.S. District Court of conspiracy to obstruct justice, and six were convicted of obstruction of justice.\textsuperscript{151} On appeal, the officers argued that the Court’s decision in \textit{Arthur Andersen} with respect to § 1512(b)(2) applied with equal force to their convictions under § 1512(b)(3).\textsuperscript{152} The Eleventh Circuit rejected this argument and affirmed their convictions and sentences,\textsuperscript{153} reasoning that although \textit{Arthur Andersen} required that “the acts of obstruction relate to ‘an official proceeding,’” § 1512(b)(3) makes no mention of “an official proceeding.”\textsuperscript{154}

2. United States v. Byrne

A federal district court jury convicted Harry Byrne, a former police sergeant, of one count of deprivation of constitutional rights and four counts of witness tampering.\textsuperscript{155} The First Circuit affirmed Byrne’s convictions but vacated his sentence.\textsuperscript{156} On appeal, Byrne challenged the sufficiency of evidence to support his convictions under \textit{Arthur Andersen}.\textsuperscript{157} The First Circuit noted that the Court in \textit{Arthur Andersen} “did not elaborate on the particularity required by the nexus requirement in subsection (b)(2).”\textsuperscript{158} Accordingly, the First


\textsuperscript{150} United States v. Aguilar, 515 U.S. 593, 599 (1995) (quoting United States v. Wood, 6 F.3d 692, 695 (10th Cir. 1993)).

\textsuperscript{151} See United States v. Ronda, 455 F.3d 1273, 1276 (11th Cir. 2006). Two of the defendants were also convicted of perjury. See id.

\textsuperscript{152} Id. at 1288.

\textsuperscript{153} Id. at 1276, 1288.

\textsuperscript{154} Id. at 1288 (citing United States v. Byrne, 435 F.3d 16, 24 (1st Cir. 2006)).

\textsuperscript{155} Byrne, 435 F.3d at 17-18.

\textsuperscript{156} Id. at 18.

\textsuperscript{157} Id.

\textsuperscript{158} Id. at 25.
Circuit declined to “resolve the exact contours of any nexus requirement in subsection (b)(3),” opting instead to “defer any final judgment for a future case that requires resolution of that issue.”

3. United States v. Quattrone

A jury found Frank Quattrone guilty of corruptly endeavoring to obstruct a grand jury proceeding, corruptly endeavoring to obstruct an SEC investigation, and witness tampering. On review, the Second Circuit vacated the judgment and remanded for retrial, concluding that the district court’s § 1512(b) jury instruction was erroneous because it “told the jury that it need not find any nexus between Quattrone’s actions and the pending investigations.” The Second Circuit noted, however, that the “question of whether the nexus requirement applies in the same way to section 1512(b) as it does to sections 1503 and 1505 is not relevant to resolution of this appeal.”

4. United States v. Vampire Nation

A jury convicted Frederick Banks on counts of mail fraud, criminal copyright infringement, uttering and possessing counterfeit or forged securities, and witness tampering. The Third Circuit affirmed Banks’s convictions and sentence in full. Banks argued that the district court improperly instructed the jury on the Arthur Andersen requirement of “a nexus between the persuasion Banks allegedly directed at [another person] and a particular proceeding.” The Third Circuit agreed with Banks that “a prosecution under [§ 1512(b)(2)] cannot succeed if the Government fails to show a ‘nexus between the “persuasion” to [impede] and any particular proceeding.’” The Third Circuit held, however, that the jury instructions exhibited no plain error in light of Arthur Andersen because the district court instructed the jury “that Banks could be found guilty of witness tampering only if he acted with the specific intent to induce [another person] to withhold evidence from an official proceeding.”

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159 Id.
160 United States v. Quattrone, 441 F.3d 153, 161 (2d Cir. 2006).
161 Id.
162 Id. at 180–81.
163 Id. at 176 n.22.
165 Id.
166 Id. at 204.
167 Id. at 205 (second alteration in original).
168 Id. at 205–06.
169 Id. at 205.
5. United States v. Darif

A jury found Anouar Darif guilty of marriage fraud, conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, and witness tampering under 18 U.S.C. § 1512(b)(1). The Seventh Circuit affirmed the conviction on all three counts. Darif argued that the district court’s failure to instruct the jury as to the definition of “corruptly persuade” constituted reversible error. The Seventh Circuit noted the Supreme Court’s holding in Arthur Andersen that the witness tampering statute “requires proof of a nexus between the corrupt persuasion and a particular proceeding.” Consequently, the Seventh Circuit found the jury instructions at issue sufficient because they made “clear to the jury that the witness tampering charge was related to ‘a particular proceeding.’”

6. United States v. Starks

At trial, a jury convicted Pernell Starks of obstructing an investigation by destroying an affidavit but found him not guilty of assaulting a federal agent. On appeal, Starks brought a multiplicity challenge, claiming that both the assault and obstruction of justice counts charged the same criminal conduct. Starks acknowledged Arthur Andersen’s requirement of a nexus between the corrupt act and the government proceeding but argued that his actions did not involve corruption, so that only the physical obstruction aspect of his conduct remained. Starks reasoned that the physical obstruction equated to an assault against a federal officer, and thus, the obstruction charge was multiplicitous. In rejecting Starks’s argument, the Seventh Circuit implicitly acknowledged that Arthur Andersen would indeed require a nexus in appropriate cases.

170 United States v. Darif, 446 F.3d 701, 703 (7th Cir. 2006).
171 Id.
172 Id. at 711.
173 Id.
174 Id. at 712.
175 United States v. Starks, 472 F.3d 466, 467–68 (7th Cir. 2006).
176 Id. at 468.
177 See id. at 470.
178 See id.
179 See id. at 469–70 ("There was no allegation that Starks tried to corruptly persuade a third party to destroy the affidavit and therefore [the] Arthur Andersen nexus requirement is not relevant to this case." (emphasis added)).
A. Defining “Nexus”

1. Generally

Much of the confusion surrounding the *Arthur Andersen* opinion stems from the issue of defining “nexus.” Presumably, “nexus” might assume a different meaning in various contexts. For example, a nexus requirement under a federal drug statute might differ from a nexus requirement in an obstruction of justice statute. Within the obstruction statutes—generally understood to comprise §§ 1501–1520—one would reasonably expect a consistent definition of the term. Because the named sections proscribe the same general type of conduct—interfering with some type of adjudication—the same definition of “nexus” should apply consistently throughout these sections.

In *United States v. Aguilar*, the Court provided a clear definition of “nexus” as applied to § 1503, reasoning that the defendant’s action “must be with an intent to influence judicial or grand jury proceedings.” The Court further explained that “the act must have a relationship in time, causation, or logic with the judicial proceedings.” Finally, the Court defined “nexus” as requiring that the “endeavor . . . have the ‘natural and probable effect’ of interfering with the due administration of justice.”

*Aguilar* thus makes clear that “nexus” requires more than mere knowledge of a pending proceeding. The nexus requirement might easily be confused with the “knowledge of a pending proceeding” requirement because the nexus requirement necessarily implies knowledge of a pending proceeding. Indeed, it would seem nearly impossible for a defendant’s act to have the natural and probable ef-

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180 *See*, e.g., *United States v. Pryor*, 75 F. App’x 157, 160 (4th Cir. 2003) (concluding that the district court did not err in applying enhanced federal drug sentencing provisions given that evidence demonstrated a *temporal nexus* between the defendant’s prior convictions and the scope of his involvement in the conspiracy).

181 *See*, e.g., *United States v. Aguilar*, 515 U.S. 593, 599 (1995) (defining the Omnibus Clause nexus element to require that “the endeavor . . . have the ‘natural and probable effect’ of interfering with the due administration of justice” (quoting *United States v. Wood*, 6 F.3d 692, 695 (10th Cir. 1993))).


183 *See* *Aguilar*, 515 U.S. at 599.

184 *Id*.

185 *Id*.

186 *Id* (quoting *United States v. Wood*, 6 F.3d 692, 695 (10th Cir. 1993)).

187 *See* id. (discussing the knowledge element as requiring that “a person is not sufficiently charged with obstructing or impeding the due administration of justice in a court unless it appears that he knew or had notice that justice was being administered in such court” (quoting *Pettibone v. United States*, 148 U.S. 197, 206 (1893))).
fect of interfering with the due administration of justice if the defendant did not, in some way, contemplate a pending proceeding. The key distinction, then, may very well amount to the difference between “contemplation” and “knowledge” of a pending proceeding. A defendant may satisfy the nexus requirement merely by contemplating a pending proceeding and acting in a way that would have the natural and probable effect of interfering with that proceeding, without ever having knowledge that the pending proceeding actually existed. Regardless, the Court makes clear that the nexus requirement and the “knowledge of a pending proceeding” requirement are distinct elements. Commentators agree with the Court that these two elements, the nexus requirement and the knowledge requirement, limit the obstruction of justice statutes.

2. Arthur Andersen and § 1512(b)

The more difficult task is to determine what the Arthur Andersen Court intended when it required some “type of nexus” in cases arising under § 1512(b). The Court provided its reasoning for the nexus requirement without ever precisely defining what it was requiring. In the absence of further guidance, a reader would likely assume that the Court viewed the nexus requirement in Arthur Andersen in the same manner that it defined the concept in Aguilar.

Though it left no clear explanation, the Arthur Andersen Court did leave hints as to its intent. First, it implied that § 1512(b) required some level of foreseeability with respect to an official proceeding. Foreseeability, however, pertains to the “knowledge of a pending proceeding,” not the nexus, requirement. A defendant who may foresee a pending proceeding may not necessarily realize that a given act will have the natural and probable effect of interfering with that proceeding. The nexus requirement, as the Court in Aguilar outlined, implies some level of materiality that is missing from mere foreseeability. Thus, “foreseeability” directly implicates nothing more than the knowledge requirement.

188 See id.

189 See, e.g., Hill, supra note 72, at 1524, 1535–48. Hill explains that the courts have used two requirements “to limit the reach of pre-Sarbanes-Oxley obstruction statutes: the ‘nexus’ requirement and the requirement that defendants have knowledge of the particular proceeding obstructed by their actions.” Id. at 1524.

190 See Arthur Andersen LLP v. United States, 544 U.S. 696, 707 (2005) (“In resisting any type of nexus element, the Government [contends] . . . .” (emphasis added)).

191 See id. at 707–08.

192 See id. (“It is . . . one thing to say that a proceeding ‘need not be pending or about to be instituted at the time of the offense,’ and quite another to say a proceeding need not even be foreseen.”).

193 But cf. United States v. Neiswender, 590 F.2d 1269, 1273–75 (4th Cir. 1979). The court in Neiswender held that the government can satisfy the knowledge requirement with
Second, the Court’s *Arthur Andersen* opinion indicates that it intended the nexus requirement to apply in the same manner as it did in *Aguilar*. The Court stated that a “‘knowingly . . . corrupt[ing] . . . persuade[r]’ cannot be someone who persuades others to shred documents under a document retention policy when he does not have *in contemplation* any particular official proceeding in which those documents might be *material*.”¹⁹⁴ The Court’s use of “contemplate” is especially important when read in conjunction with “material.”¹⁹⁵ This language implies that when the Court talks about the nexus requirement, it is not talking about knowledge of a pending proceeding but rather *contemplation* of a particular proceeding that the acts of the defendant might *materially* affect.¹⁹⁶ This strongly suggests that the Court in *Arthur Andersen* was applying the *Aguilar* nexus requirement.

Unfortunately, the Court never explicitly announced that it was applying the *Aguilar* nexus requirement to § 1512(b)—as opposed to some other type of nexus—despite devoting the penultimate paragraph of the opinion to a discussion of *Aguilar*.¹⁹⁷ The Court did, however, state that it “faced a similar situation in *Aguilar,*” implying application of the nexus requirement to § 1512(b) in the same manner as to § 1503.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, after briefly restating the facts of *Aguilar*, the Court in *Arthur Andersen* repeated its holding, requiring “a ‘nexus’ between the obstructive act and the proceeding.”¹⁹⁹ The Court’s quotation of the term “nexus” in the context of its § 1512(b) discussion²⁰⁰ tends to convey a clear intention to import the term—with the same meaning—from *Aguilar* and apply it to § 1512(b). Indeed, the Court’s conclusion of its nexus discussion essentially constitutes acceptance of the *Aguilar* nexus requirement precedent.²⁰¹

the lesser showing of “notice” or “the reasonable foreseeability of the natural and probable consequences of one’s acts.” *Id.* at 1273 (emphasis added).

The Second, Sixth, Seventh, and Eleventh Circuits have followed the approach in *Neiswender*. See United States v. Atkin, 107 F.3d 1213, 1219 (6th Cir. 1997); United States v. Bucey, 876 F.2d 1297, 1314 (7th Cir. 1989); United States v. Silverman, 745 F.2d 1386, 1393–96 (11th Cir. 1984); United States v. Buffalano, 727 F.2d 50, 53–54 (2d Cir. 1984).

¹⁹⁴ *Arthur Andersen*, 544 U.S. at 708 (emphasis added) (alterations in original) (omission in original).

¹⁹⁵ “Material” is defined as being of “such a nature that knowledge of the item would affect a person’s decision-making; significant; essential.” *Black’s Law Dictionary* 998 (8th ed., 2004).

¹⁹⁶ Compare the language in *Aguilar* that “if the defendant lacks knowledge that his actions are likely to affect the judicial proceeding, he lacks the requisite intent to obstruct.” United States v. Aguilar, 515 U.S. 593, 599 (1995).

¹⁹⁷ *See Arthur Andersen*, 544 U.S. at 708.

¹⁹⁸ *Id*.

¹⁹⁹ *Id*.

²⁰⁰ *See id*.

²⁰¹ *See id*.
B. The Nexus Requirement and § 1512(c)

The passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002 greatly augmented the government’s ability to prosecute subsequent witness tampering and document destruction cases. Some argued that §§ 1512(c) and 1519 would largely displace § 1512(b) as the tools for prosecuting obstructive document destruction. Thus, one commentator, John Hasnas, brushed aside Arthur Andersen as a “meaningless,” albeit “important,” decision. Despite this apparent contradiction, Hasnas is clearly correct that some document destruction prosecutions will utilize § 1512(c) or § 1519, notwithstanding prosecutors’ natural tendency to prefer trusted, preexisting statutes. It does not follow, however, that the reasoning behind Arthur Andersen does not pertain to these newer statutes as well.

In many respects, § 1512(c)(2) appears destined to become the new Omnibus Clause. According to President George W. Bush, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act arose from a need to “adopt[] tough new provisions to deter and punish corporate and accounting fraud and corruption, ensure justice for wrongdoers, and protect the interests of workers and shareholders.” Unlike § 1512(b), § 1512(c)(2) is intransitive—it applies to obstructive activity that the defendant directly performs, rather than obstructive activity that the defendant somehow encourages. To the extent that § 1512(c)(2) overlaps with § 1503, § 1512(c)(2)’s requirement that there be obstruction of an “official proceeding” is broader and more widely applicable than § 1503, which applies only to obstruction of a pending “judicial proceeding.” Furthermore, and very importantly, § 1512(f) states that “[f]or the purposes of this section[,] an official proceeding need not

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203 See, e.g., Hasnas, supra note 28, at 193–94; see also O’Sullivan, supra note 83, at 654–55 (arguing that prosecutors leverage “substantially greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the defense” by exploiting the choices available to them to prosecute new offenses that are essentially “more specialized models of old statutes”).
204 See Hasnas, supra note 28, at 187.
205 See O’Sullivan, supra note 83, at 685 (“[Sarbanes-Oxley] added a new omnibus provision, § 1512(c)(2), which mimics in major part § 1503’s omnibus clause but is applicable in contexts outside of the judicial proceedings that § 1503 protects, such as in proceedings before federal agencies and in congressional inquiries.”).
208 Sections 1503 and 1512(c)(2) both involve instances in which the defendant acted “corruptly” to “influence.” See O’Sullivan, supra note 83, at 712. But see id. at 713 (pointing out that § 1503 requires an “endeavor,” while § 1512 applies only to “attempts,” a slightly more demanding standard).
be pending or about to be instituted at the time of the offense.”

Thus, unlike § 1503, § 1512(c)(2) does not require that the defendant know of a pending proceeding.

In determining the attractiveness of prosecuting under § 1512(c)(2), an important issue is the extent to which the nexus requirement applies. Given the *Aguilar* Court’s reasoning for applying a nexus requirement to § 1503 and the *Arthur Andersen* Court’s reasoning for applying the nexus requirement to § 1512(b), the Court would likely apply the same requirement to § 1512(c)(2). Thus, assuming the nexus requirement will apply, the intransitive nature of § 1512(c)(2) is the only facially obvious difference between the statutory text of §§ 1512(c)(2) and 1512(b).

In *Aguilar*, the Court discussed Justice Scalia’s dissent, analogizing his position to finding that a person violated § 1503

if he knew of a pending investigation and lied to his wife about his whereabouts at the time of the crime, thinking that an FBI agent might decide to interview her and that she might in turn be influenced in her statement to the agent by her husband’s false account of his whereabouts.

The majority concluded its § 1503 discussion by asserting that in such a hypothetical, “[t]he intent to obstruct justice is indeed present, but the man’s culpability is a good deal less clear from the statute than [the Court] usually require[s] in order to impose criminal liability.”

Likewise, the Court in *Arthur Andersen* concluded its discussion of the nexus requirement and § 1512(b) by simply repeating its holding in *Aguilar*. In light of the Court’s concern for culpability in applying the nexus requirement to § 1503, as well as the extensive similarities between §§ 1503 and 1512(c)(2), the reasoning in *Aguilar* also demands application of the nexus requirement to § 1512(c)(2). Moreover, *Arthur Andersen* demonstrated that the Court remains willing to defer to precedent when considering whether to apply the nexus requirement to obstruc-

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209 § 1512(f)(1) (Supp. IV 2004); O’Sullivan, *supra* note 83, at 712 (explaining that the official proceeding need not be pending for purposes of § 1512 prosecutions).


212 Id.


214 See id.
tion of justice cases, making the case for applying a nexus requirement to § 1512(c)(2) even stronger.

The option to use either § 1503 or § 1512(c)(2) significantly impacts prosecutorial bargaining power. The maximum penalty under § 1503 is ten years’ imprisonment, while the maximum penalty under § 1512(c) is twenty years. In addition, § 1512(c)(2) overlaps with § 1505’s application to congressional and agency investigations. Under § 1505, the maximum penalty is a mere five-year term of imprisonment. Although this prosecutorial leverage presents little constitutional concern, defendants may, in close cases, choose to negotiate a plea agreement rather than pursue trial. The potential limit on § 1512(c)(2) prosecutions offered by a nexus requirement remains attractive to defendants given the advantages that a choice among statutes currently affords the prosecution.

C. The Nexus Requirement and § 1519

Sarbanes-Oxley significantly enhanced the prosecutorial arsenal for document destruction with the addition of § 1519. Like § 1512(c), § 1519 is intransitive, affecting obstructive activity that the defendant directly performs. Moreover, it also appears to extend to executive branch or agency investigations, which allows broad prosecutorial reach. Significantly, § 1519 omits the mental state element “corruptly,” merely requiring that one “knowingly” destroy documents with the intent to impede a federal investigation.

Some commentators have downplayed the significance of § 1519 by arguing that it does little to proscribe conduct that earlier statutes had not already criminalized. This view stems from the claim that § 1519 fails to meaningfully extend the broad reach that some courts had given obstruction of justice statutes prior to Sarbanes-Oxley. One commentator observed the sentiments of others that “criminal
practitioners view the new provisions and get-tough rhetoric [of Sarbanes-Oxley] as little more than sound and fury signifying nothing.”

Dana Hill adopts a different approach by arguing that § 1519 “can play a new and significant role in prohibiting anticipatory obstruction of justice—document destruction by individuals who are savvy enough to pre-empt an investigation by acting before they have knowledge about the specific proceeding that may demand the documents.” In other words, Hill argues that Congress intended and, in fact, designed § 1519 to generate an entirely new area of obstruction of justice law—that of anticipatory obstruction. Under this theory, courts could find § 1519 liability in cases in which the defendant “intentionally destroys documents with only a general contemplation of the obstructed proceedings.” As Hill points out, this would eliminate the “knowledge of a specific proceeding” requirement from § 1519 cases.

Hill augments his interpretation of § 1519 by arguing that this position “gives distinct meaning to the unique language of § 1519, which imposes liability on those who act ‘in relation to or contemplation of’ a federal investigation or matter.” To the extent that courts may read the “knowledge of a pending proceeding” requirement out of § 1519, the language to which Hill refers still lends itself to application of the nexus requirement. In addition, Hill expresses disbelief at the possibility of redundancy between § 1519 and pre-Sarbanes-Oxley obstruction of justice statutes. Assuming that a nonredundant criminal code is desirable, Hill’s reading partially avoids redundancy only with respect to the “knowledge of a pending proceeding” requirement while leaving the threat of redundancy with respect to the nexus requirement. Applying the nexus requirement to § 1519

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229 Id. at 1523 (citing W. Warren Hamel et al., They Got Tougher: New Criminal Penalties for Fraud and Obstruction Affect All Companies, LEGAL TIMES, Oct. 7, 2002, at 34; Abbe David Lowell & Kathryn C. Arnold, Corporate Crime After 2000: A New Law Enforcement Challenge or D´ej`a Vu?, 40 AM. CRIM. L. REV. 219, 225 (2003)).
230 Id. at 1565.
231 Id.
232 See id.; see also id. 1565 n.295 (discussing Justice Scalia’s Aguilar dissent, in which he posited that awareness of a pending proceeding must only be shown insofar as it relates to the actor’s intent).
233 Id. at 1565 (quoting 18 U.S.C. § 1519 (Supp. IV 2004)).
234 See id.
235 There is still a slight overlap with respect to the knowledge requirement because knowledge of a pending proceeding would certainly satisfy Hill’s “general contemplation” requirement.
helps to remedy the concern for jury confusion\textsuperscript{236} that has troubled some commentators. Requiring that the obstruction exhibit the “natural and probable effect of interfering with the due administration of justice”\textsuperscript{237} helps clarify the meaning of “in relation to or contemplation of.”\textsuperscript{238} A nexus requirement would also help to alleviate concern that courts might “reward perpetrators of business crimes for their prescience by shifting the focus from the actor’s mental state regarding the proceeding to the actor’s mental state regarding the obstruction.”\textsuperscript{239} The nexus keeps the focus on both the actor’s mental state regarding the proceeding and the actor’s mental state regarding the obstruction by demanding that the obstruction have the natural and probable effect of interfering with the proceeding.

Although some arguments for eliminating the “knowledge of a pending proceeding” requirement from § 1519 have merit, they do not hold true for the nexus requirement. Following the \textit{Arthur Andersen} trial verdict, then-Assistant United States Attorney Andrew Weissmann stated, “When you expect the police, don’t destroy evidence.”\textsuperscript{240} This statement is simply too broad. One defense to prosecution under § 1519 involves consistent application and enforcement of a retention policy, which tends to demonstrate a lack of the requisite specific intent to obstruct justice.\textsuperscript{241} As Hill acknowledges, the statute explicitly limits itself by using “contemplation” as a separate mental state regarding the obstructed proceeding.\textsuperscript{242} The nexus requirement is not only consistent with this added language but is desirable as a limitation on the expansive reading that some commentators and courts would like to afford § 1519. In \textit{Aguilar}, the Court appealed to culpability when it applied the nexus requirement to § 1503,\textsuperscript{243} and the Court in \textit{Arthur Andersen} followed that precedent by applying the nexus requirement to § 1512(b).\textsuperscript{244} Courts should follow the same course with respect to § 1519.

\textsuperscript{236} Cf. Hill, \textit{supra} note 72, at 1565–66 (offering “an alternative to the confusing jury instructions under § 1512 which instruct jurors that they do not need to find that a proceeding was in progress when the obstructive act took place, but that they do need to find an ‘intent to obstruct . . . an official proceeding’” (omission in original)).


\textsuperscript{238} § 1519.

\textsuperscript{239} Hill, \textit{supra} note 72, at 1566 (discussing jury confusion regarding the “knowledge of a pending proceeding” requirement).

\textsuperscript{240} Id.

\textsuperscript{241} See id. Of course, this does not constitute a defense under the actual language of the statute but may act to prevent successful prosecution of the crime.

\textsuperscript{242} See § 1519; Hill, \textit{supra} note 72, at 1567.


\textsuperscript{244} See Arthur Andersen LLP v. United States, 544 U.S. 696, 708 (2005).
D. Practical and Constitutional Considerations

1. Document Retention Policies After Arthur Andersen

Business entities develop document retention policies for various business and legal reasons, resulting in both economic and legal protection. The policy at issue in Arthur Andersen mandated that employees only retain final work papers supporting client audits and required destruction of drafts, notes, and memos. The same policy also required employees to retain all documents related to any litigation anticipated by Arthur Andersen.

To avoid inundation beneath ever-growing piles of documents, business organizations inevitably look to document retention policies as a way of managing space limitations and storage costs. Business entities should create such policies prior to engaging in document destruction, and these policies should clearly describe which documents to retain, which documents to destroy, and the appropriate time frame for destruction.

Not only do companies, firms, and partnerships purge useless documents, but they also utilize document retention policies to keep “unnecessarily damaging documents from coming to light.” Simply put, document retention policies reduce legal exposure. Nevertheless, all document retention policies “should clearly state the categorization of documents and electronic files, what documents must be preserved, the retention period for each category, the document destruction procedures, and what to do when litigation or an investigation commences.”

Because a document retention policy may work against a company if employees violate it, strict compliance is essential. To secure strict employee compliance, management should inform all

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246 See id. at 723.
247 See id.
248 See id. at 724.
249 See id. In addition, organizations should adopt document retention policies outside the context of current litigation. See Lisa Shaheen, Required Recordkeeping Sets the Record Straight, PEST CONTROL, Apr. 2001, at 27.
251 Chase, supra note 245, at 725.
252 Id. at 725–26 (citing Robert M. Barker et al., Document Retention, INTERNAL AUDITOR, Dec. 1996, at 50–51).
253 See id. at 726.
employees of the policy and its procedures,254 and should clarify that the purpose of the policy is not to dishonestly destroy evidence.255 To be safe, once any legal proceeding is contemplated or initiated, business entities should halt the normal operation of their document retention policies and instruct employees to retain all documents related to the proceeding.256

The post-Arthur Andersen Sedona Guidelines—promulgated by The Sedona Conference—provide additional guidance to business organizations.257 The Sedona Guidelines consist of four basic guidelines for business entities desiring to adopt a valid document retention policy:

Guideline 1: An organization should have reasonable policies and procedures for managing its information and records.

Guideline 2: An organization’s information and records management policies and procedures should be realistic, practical, and tailored to the circumstances of the organization.

Guideline 3: An organization need not retain all electronic information ever generated or received.

Guideline 4: An organization adopting an information and records management policy should also develop procedures that address the creation, identification, retention, retrieval, and ultimate disposition or destruction of information and records.258

The Sedona Guidelines also provide case law analysis and discussion of secondary authorities to provide more detailed guidance for development of document retention policies.259

Most courts abstain from punishing document destruction pursuant to a business organization’s legitimate document retention policy.260 Still, the policies must be reasonable and purposeful—not merely a pretense—for destroying evidence in contemplation of litigation.261 As Arthur Andersen made clear at the district court level, a document retention policy will not immunize a business entity from

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254 See id. at 726–27.
256 See Chase, supra note 245, at 727.
259 See id.
260 See Chase, supra note 245, at 728 (citing Moore v. Gen. Motors Corp., 558 S.W.2d 720, 737 (Mo. Ct. App. 1977) (“[W]e see no evidence of fraud or bad faith in a corporation destroying records it is no longer required by law to keep and which are destroyed in accord with its regular practices.”)).
261 See id.
sanctions. Moreover, document destruction in the absence of a document retention policy may constitute bad faith on the part of the business entity.

It is especially important for organizations to follow developments in obstruction of justice laws. With a firm knowledge of the developing laws, businesses can appropriately balance the competing purposes of obstruction laws and document retention policies. Determining whether a nexus must exist between the alleged obstruction and the pending proceeding is of great practical importance to a company seeking to establish a document retention policy.

2. Prosecutorial Discretion and Power

Federal prosecutors enjoy broad prosecutorial discretion, allowing for far-reaching control over criminal cases. The power to charge is perhaps the strongest example of the reach of prosecutorial discretion. Prosecutors determine whether and how to charge a defendant, as well as whether to offer a plea bargain and the ultimate terms of such an agreement. Because trial presents a defendant with the risk of additional convictions and an extended prison term compared to most plea agreements, plea bargaining resolves a majority of criminal cases. Thus, prosecutorial control over the plea bargaining process translates into direct control over the resolution of the majority of criminal cases.

Given this significant prosecutorial power, the potential for abuse of discretion is high. Coercive pretrial tactics include intimidation of

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262 See id. (citing Lewy v. Remington Arms Co., 836 F.2d 1104, 1112 (8th Cir. 1988) ("[A] corporation cannot blindly destroy documents and expect to be shielded by a seemingly innocuous document retention policy.").

263 See id.

264 Chase argues that this balance can be achieved if a document retention policy is: a) suspended when a corporation learns that litigation or an investigation into the corporation is imminent; b) the corporation then reinstates the policy as to irrelevant or unnecessary documents regarding the investigation or litigation proceedings; c) and is fully reinstated once the investigation or litigation proceedings are over, thereby making the process cost effective while at the same time complying with the government and the essence of fairness.

Id. at 756 (footnote omitted).


266 Davis, The American Prosecutor, supra note 265, at 408.

267 See id. at 409.


269 See, e.g., Davis, The American Prosecutor, supra note 265, 408–09.
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witnesses,\textsuperscript{270} and vindictive\textsuperscript{272} prosecution, and abuse of the grand jury process.\textsuperscript{273} Examples of abusive prosecution trial tactics include improper opening statements,\textsuperscript{274} cross-examination,\textsuperscript{275} and closing arguments.\textsuperscript{276} In addition, prosecutors may violate their legal duty to reveal exculpatory evidence to the defense.\textsuperscript{277}

In addition to these tangible examples of prosecutorial misconduct, a prosecutor’s decision to bring charges without sufficient evidence is both unethical and harmful.\textsuperscript{278} Despite these concerns, prosecutors tend to “charge more and greater offenses than they can prove beyond a reasonable doubt.”\textsuperscript{279} And while defendants frequently plead to reduced charges, even these lesser charges often exceed the scope of evidence available to the prosecutor.\textsuperscript{280}

\textsuperscript{270} Id. at 410 (citing United States v. Schlei, 122 F.3d 944, 991 (11th Cir. 1997) (threatening a witness with loss of immunity if he testified for the defense); United States v. LaFuente, 54 F.3d 457, 459, 461 (8th Cir. 1995) (alleging that the government threatened a witness with jail time if she spoke to the defense counsel or the press); United States v. MacCloskey, 682 F.2d 468, 475 (4th Cir. 1982) (threatening a witness’s attorney with reindictment if the witness self-incriminated while testifying)).

\textsuperscript{271} Id. (citing United States v. Armstrong, 517 U.S. 456, 459 (1996) (evaluating a selective prosecution claim supported by a “study” purporting to show that the government failed to prosecute nonblack individuals for cocaine and crack offenses); United States v. Al Jibori, 90 F.3d 22, 23–24 (2d Cir. 1996) (evaluating a selective prosecution claim stemming from pattern similarity between defendant and a known terrorist, both of whom separately entered the United States with fake Swedish passports); United States v. Cyprian, 23 F.3d 1189, 1195 (7th Cir. 1994) (claiming that the government singled out defendants based on their religious faith)).

\textsuperscript{272} Id. (citing United States v. Holloway, 74 F.3d 249, 250–51 (11th Cir. 1996) (dismissing criminal charges brought by the prosecution pursuant to the defendant’s deposition and in violation of a pre-existing immunity agreement); United States v. Dudden, 65 F.3d 1461, 1464–68, 1472 (9th Cir. 1995) (vacating the defendant’s sentence where prosecutors breached an informal immunity agreement and induced the defendant to force cooperation in another investigation)).

\textsuperscript{273} Id. at 411 (citing United States v. Chen, 993 F.2d 793, 796–98 (9th Cir. 1991) (examining a “perjury trap” in which a prosecutor calls a witness for the primary purpose of obtaining testimony to support a later prosecution of the witness for perjury); Barry v. United States, 865 F.2d 1317, 1318–21 (D.C. Cir. 1989) (involving alleged grand jury secrecy violations where a United States Attorney issued a press release disclosing matters occurring before a federal grand jury); United States v. Samango, 607 F.2d 877, 884–85 (9th Cir. 1979) (upholding the dismissal of an indictment due to prosecutorial misconduct in grand jury proceedings)).

\textsuperscript{274} Id.

\textsuperscript{275} Id. (citing United States v. Sanchez, 176 F.3d 1214, 1219, 1221–22 (9th Cir. 1999) (finding misconduct where the prosecutor had forced the defendant to call the United States marshal a liar and impeached the defendant with inadmissible evidence)).

\textsuperscript{276} Id. (citing United States v. Francis, 170 F.3d 546, 551–53 (6th Cir. 1999) (holding that the prosecutor’s closing argument and witness bolstering necessitated a new trial)).

\textsuperscript{277} See id. at 411–12 (citing Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83, 87–88 (1963) (determining that withholding material exculpatory evidence violates “standards of justice” and fairness to the accused)).

\textsuperscript{278} See id. at 413.

\textsuperscript{279} Id.

\textsuperscript{280} See id.
matters worse, defendants face difficulty in availing themselves of discovery procedures necessary to obtain judicial review of prosecutorial misconduct, and courts rarely act to remedy abuses.281

Prosecutorial power and the potential for misconduct remain equally troubling in the context of white collar investigations.282 Prosecutors yield tremendous leverage in the white collar arena—given the potentially catastrophic effects of a mere indictment, many companies opt to yield to prosecutorial authority and cooperate.283 Moreover, under the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, cooperation is a factor that “mitigate[s] the ultimate punishment” of business entities.284 The advantage that prosecutors hold in criminal cases—both white collar and non-white-collar alike—is clear.

The broad and far-reaching power that federal prosecutors enjoy in white collar criminal cases calls for additional limitations on white collar statutes. As a general matter, corporate defendants often find themselves in dire straits amidst investigation and prosecution. Because of the significant leverage that prosecutors possess—and the grave consequences that may result—federal courts must clarify and limit the language of obstruction of justice statutes. If nothing else, limiting language in the form of a nexus requirement will clarify the scope of criminal behavior. The risk of prosecutorial abuse is especially relevant given the concern for culpability that the Court discussed in Aguilar when introducing the nexus requirement to the realm of obstruction of justice.285 With the risk of prosecutorial abuse and the concern for culpability just as relevant throughout the obstruction of justice statutes, the trend toward a broadly applicable nexus requirement should continue.

281 See id. at 414.
282 But see Elizabeth K. Ainslie, Indicting Corporations Revisited: Lessons of the Arthur Andersen Prosecution, 43 A.M. CРИМ. L. РЕВ. 107, 114 (2006) (“On the criminal side of things, resources are limited: prosecutors have other crimes besides corporate misconduct to pursue, and white-collar investigations often take years of prosecutor and investigator time to complete.”); Peter J. Henning, Targeting Legal Advice, 54 AM. U. L. РЕВ. 669, 671 (2005) (“The difficulty prosecutors face in prosecuting corporate misconduct and other types of white-collar crimes is identifying the particular acts that violate the statute, and then amassing sufficient proof of intent to establish that a crime has occurred.”).
283 See George Ellard, Making the Silent Speak and the Informed Wary, 42 AM. CRIM. L. РЕВ. 985, 987–88 (2005) (“[A]s the demise of the accounting firm Arthur Andersen demonstrates, indictments can be lethal, even for venerable institutions. The 2002 indictment of that company and its subsequent conviction for obstruction of justice caused the 90-year-old entity to implode. Thus, the possibility of avoiding indictment creates a strong incentive for business organizations to cooperate in government investigations.”).
285 See supra notes 211–12 and accompanying text.
3. **Constitutional Constraints and Canons of Construction**

The Constitution can provide additional guidance as to whether the *Aguilar* nexus requirement should apply to §§ 1512(b), 1512(c)(2), and 1519. Obstruction of justice statutes often survive constitutional challenges by defendants claiming they lacked notice that the law prohibited their actions.**286** Defendants have challenged the obstruction statutes on various grounds,**287** including vagueness,**288** overbreadth,**289** and free expression under the First Amendment.**290** Obstruction of justice statutes have also survived Double Jeopardy challenges,**291** Fifth Amendment due process challenges,**292** and challenges that Congress overstepped its authority under the Necessary and Proper Clause.**293** Given the history of unsuccessful constitutional challenges to obstruction of justice statutes, defendants considering such challenges to the nexus requirement should proceed with an understanding of the unlikelihood of success.

Criminal canons of construction serve as valuable tools for examining the application of the nexus requirement to obstruction of justice statutes from a constitutional perspective. Courts typically apply canons of construction dealing with ambiguity only after examining prior judicial decisions,**294** legislative history,**295** and underlying policies**296** of the law.**297** Although courts reserve the application of canons of construction until the completion of this hierarchical analysis,

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**Notes:**

286 See Hill, *supra* note 72, at 1560; see also Keith Palfin & Sandhya Prabhu, *Obstruction of Justice*, 40 AM. CRIM. L. REV. 873, 886–87, 900–01 (2003) (citing cases holding that the § 1503 Omnibus Clause is not unconstitutionally vague and noting that courts have upheld §§ 1512 and 1513 against various constitutional challenges).


288 See, e.g., United States v. Tyler, 281 F.3d 84, 91–92 (3d Cir. 2002) (rejecting arguments of constitutional vagueness with respect to § 1512 despite the fact that the prosecution need not prove the defendant’s mental state as to the federal nature of the proceeding); United States v. Shotts, 145 F.3d 1289, 1300 (11th Cir. 1998); United States v. Thompson, 76 F.3d 442, 452 (2d Cir. 1996).

289 See, e.g., Shotts, 145 F.3d at 1300; Thompson, 76 F.3d at 452.

290 See, e.g., Thompson, 76 F.3d at 452; United States v. Velasquez, 772 F.2d 1348, 1356–58 (7th Cir. 1985); United States v. Wilson, 565 F. Supp. 1416, 1429–30 (S.D.N.Y. 1983).


292 See, e.g., Tyler, 281 F.3d at 93–94.

293 See, e.g., id. at 92–95.


295 See 3 NORMAN J. SINGER, STATUTES AND STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION § 59:3, at 134 (6th ed. 2001) (“The rule of lenity should only be applied if after reviewing all sources of legislative intent the statute still remains ambiguous.”).


such canons still provide a useful tool by which to consider potentially
ambiguous statutory language.

At the head of the criminal canons of construction is the prin-

298 ciple of legality. The principle of legality “stands for the desirability
299 in principle of advance legislative specification of criminal mis-
300 conduct.” The concerns of legality arise under the doctrines of vague-

301 ness and lenity. The vagueness doctrine acts as the “operational
302 arm of legality” and requires that a “crime definition be meaningfully
303 precise—or at least that it not be meaninglessly indefinite.” Filling

304 in the post-Sarbanes-Oxley obstruction statutes with the nexus re-
305 quirement will help to ensure that the statutes do not reach an uncon-
306 stitutional level of vagueness.

Among the most common of the canons of construction is the

307 rule of lenity. The rule of lenity states that “penal statutes should be
308 strictly construed against the government.” In interpreting the ob-
309 struction statutes in cases of sufficient ambiguity, the rule of lenity
310 may act as a tiebreaker and compel application of the nexus require-
311 ment as a limitation on the government’s ability to prosecute.

CONCLUSION

In the wake of the corporate scandals of the late twentieth and

312 early twenty-first centuries, the area of white collar crime has never
313 been more significant. A successful prosecution can not only vindicate
314 corporate fraud but also destroy the corporation itself and the
315 jobs that it provides. The high stakes of white collar crime demand
316 clear and cautious rules that provide prosecutors and courts alike con-
317 crete guidelines with which to make their decisions.

The U.S. Supreme Court in Aguilar and Arthur Andersen made its

318 intentions known by applying restrictive nexus requirements to the
319 § 1503 Omnibus Clause and to the § 1512(b) noncoercive witness
320 tampering clause. Given the Court’s appeal to culpability and nexus
321 requirement precedent in those cases, the importance of having clear
322 rules, and the necessity of limiting criminal statutes to avoid criminal-

298 Jeffries, supra note 294, at 190 (“It is, as Herbert Packer said, ‘the first principle’ of
299 the criminal law, of ‘central importance’ in academic discussions of the subject, and all-but-
300 universally complied with in this country.” (quoting HERBERT L. PACKER, THE LIMITS OF THE
301 CRIMINAL SANCTION 79–80 (1968))).
302 See id. at 195 (“[T]he concerns of legality . . . arise under the subsidiary doctrines of
303 vagueness and strict construction—doctrines that, although of very different origin, are
304 used today to implement the legality ideal.”).
305 Id. at 196.
306 SINGER, supra note 295, at 125; see also United States v. Wiltberger, 18 U.S. (5
307 Wheat.) 76, 95 (1820) (describing the rule of lenity as “perhaps not much less old than
308 construction itself”).
izing innocent behavior, the nexus requirement should apply to Sarbanes-Oxley’s additions to obstruction of justice in §§ 1512(c) and 1519. The stakes are simply too high to not take the Court’s restrictions seriously.
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