

WASHINGTON, DC – Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), Rep Michael Honda, introduced the Reuniting Families Act, H.R. 2709, which presented a key component of comprehensive immigration reform: family reunification. The legislation ends lengthy separations of loved ones, promotes family stability, and fosters the economic growth that immigrant families have provided throughout our history.

Joining the Congressman today were CAPAC's Immigration Task Force Chairman Rep. Neil Abercrombie, CAPAC Executive Board Member Rep. Mazie Hirono, Reps. Tammy Baldwin, Sheila Jackson Lee, Jerrold Nadler, the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, NAACP, League of United Latin American Citizens, Immigration Equality, United Methodist Church, and Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. CAPAC Members Reps. Eni Faleomavaega, Raul Grijalva, Barbara Lee, Doris O. Matsui, Carolyn Maloney, Laura Richardson, Lucille Roybal-Allard, Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, Pete Stark, Lynn Woolsey, and David Wu were also among the bill's 56 original cosponsors.

**Rep. Michael Honda** said, "The Reuniting Families Act should be at the heart of comprehensive immigration reform. Our system has not been updated in 20 years, separating spouses, children, siblings and their parents, who have played by the rules, for years, often decades. Our legislation is in line with both American family values and with our short-term need to grow our economy and save taxpayer money. With this bill, we are providing legal mechanisms to streamline the current immigration logjam, preventing waste of precious government resources and rewarding those who play by the rules. We are providing the American economy with new funds, in terms of remittances, which will now remain in the US with reunited families instead of being sent home, that's an extra \$46 billion from Latin American in one year alone. And we are comprehensive – making sure that all families, including same-sex partners, are reunited."

**Karen Narasaki, Executive Director, Asian American Justice Center:** "We commend Congressman Honda and his colleagues for championing this legislation on behalf of the millions of immigrants who are currently caught up in an unworkable system that keeps them apart from their closest loved ones for too many years," said Karen K. Narasaki, president and executive director of AAJC. "The Reuniting Families Act reflects our nation's values and recognizes the contributions families make to our society and economy. It is a key building block for the broader comprehensive reform that is needed to fix our broken immigration system."

**Rep. Jerrold Nadler:** "Making the goal of family reunification a reality needs to be at the core of immigration reform," said Nadler. "Enabling and promoting strong, stable families is a value at the very heart of American society. Stable families are stable families regardless of whether a couple includes one who is from another country, gay or lesbian, or both. Let's pass the Reuniting Families Act and move unequivocally to promote healthy American families, no matter what those families look like. We can't afford to do otherwise."

**Eliseo Medina, Vice President, Service Employees International Union (SEIU):** "There is nothing more powerful than the desire to be with the family you love. It is why we go to work, it is why we want to succeed and why we care so much about building a better country. A strong family often provides the support structure needed to be a strong contributor to society and to pursue the American Dream. For too many SEIU members and other hard working immigrants, bureaucratic backlogs and wait times keep their families thousands of miles away. This legislation will help reduce illegal immigration through several long-sought improvements to our family-based visa system. We are proud to support this bill and the thousands of stronger families it will help."

**Rep. Mazie Hirono:** "I have listened to many heartbreaking stories of sons and daughters of our Filipino World War II veterans waiting patiently in the Philippines with the hope that one day they will be able to come to the United States to care for their aging parents," said Hirono. "I am glad that the Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act is a part of the Reuniting Families Act."

The Reuniting Families Act helps to clear the current immigration logjam of 5.8 million people by providing legal mechanisms to streamline the application process. At present, the bureaucratic backlog wastes precious government resources, both human and financial. In response, the bill streamlines the application process so that it is fair and incentivizes potential applicants to use legal channels to join their family in the United States. A streamlined system and reduced backlog would demonstrate to immigrants tempted to arrive outside the legal process that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for those who stay within the legal process.

As a result of current long waits, many family members who apply for visas in the prime of their

lives are not granted admission until they reach retirement age, undermining their economic contribution to our country and encouraging some frustrated relatives to resort to illegal migration. “By providing American workers with a vital social safety net – that is, their family – we help make our communities stronger and more resilient,” said Rep. Honda. “The benefits here cannot be overstated. American workers with families by their side are happier, healthier and more able to succeed than those distanced from loved ones for years on end.”

Specifically, the bill does the following:

- Recaptures unused family-based and employment-based visas previously allocated by Congress which remain unused.
- Allows a green card holder to reunite with their spouses and minor children: The bill classifies the children and spouses of lawful permanent residents as “immediate relatives.” This would allow lawful permanent residence spouses and children to immediately qualify for a visa.
- Increases the per country limits of family and employment-based visas from 7% to 10%: Right now, each country only has a 7% share of the total cap of visas that Congress allocates each year. Increasing each country’s percentage of visas would eliminate the absurdly long wait times for individuals to immigrant from certain countries like the Philippines, China, and India.
- Allows orphans, widows and widowers to immigrate despite death of a petitioner.
- Promotes family unity by allowing more people to use the system: The bill gives the Attorney General greater flexibility to address numerous hardships, including family separation, caused by a provision that bars individuals who had been unlawfully present in the United States from utilizing our legal immigration system.
- Recognizes the sacrifices that certain World War II Filipino veterans made for this country, by exempting their children from the numerical caps on visas.
- Ends discrimination in immigration law, allowing same-sex partners to reunite.

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*The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a bicameral and bipartisan caucus of Members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and Members who have a strong dedication to promoting the well-being of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Founded in 1994 by then Congressman Norman Mineta, and currently chaired by Congressman Michael Honda, CAPAC has been addressing the needs of the AAPI*

*community in all areas of American life. For more information on CAPAC, please call (202) 225-2631 or visit <http://www.honda.house.gov/capac> .*