



STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE "REUNITING FAMILIES ACT"

The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), a 35-year old New York-based national organization, supports the passage of the Reuniting Families Act, as introduced by Congressman Michael Honda in June 2009. This bill strengthens family reunification as the cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy and recognizes the principle of equal rights for all within our immigration system.

The Reuniting Families Act addresses in a pragmatic way the numerical and procedural barriers that have kept immigrant families, including permanent partners, separated for decades. Key provisions of the bill would facilitate the adjustment of status for more than 320,000 spouses and children still waiting to be reunited with their families. This would be achieved by reclassifying them as immediate relatives eligible for a green card (proof of lawful permanent residency), thereby reducing long waiting times for legal immigrants. The bill would also increase the number of available visas by recapturing fifteen years of unused preference-system visas (fiscal years 1992-2007) based on family or employment sponsorship. Unused visa numbers in future years could be rolled over into the next fiscal year, easing immigration backlogs and long waiting times. Additional visas would also be made available annually to all families, including permanent partners, based on a percentage of total admissions into the United States.

Another critical provision promoting family unity would allow the government to be more generous in exercising its discretion favorably toward immigrants by lifting legal bars against their reentry due to unlawful presence in the United States.

Finally, this bill would promote family values and equal rights in other important ways. It would afford equal treatment for all stepchildren, thus granting them the same rights as biological children. Title II would also confer equal rights upon permanent partners and their family members, thus ending discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families. Such reforms to our immigration system are long overdue.

AALDEF supports the Reuniting Families Act, and we urge the passage of this important and timely legislation to promote equal rights and keep families together.

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The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), founded in 1974, is a New York-based national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.