



American Jewish Committee

Office of Government and International Affairs

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June 9, 2009

Re: H.R.2709 Reuniting Families Act

Dear Representative:

I write on behalf of the American Jewish Committee in support of the Reuniting Families Act (H.R.2709), a bill introduced by Rep. Michael Honda (CA) that would implement critically needed reforms in the family immigration system and restore family unity as a fundamental principle of immigration policy. The Reuniting Families Act aims to help immigrant families reunite more quickly and protect families from being separated, thus promoting family stability and fostering economic growth.

Over the more than a century since our founding in 1906, AJC has been a strong voice in support of fair and generous treatment of immigrants, including long-standing support for family unification as a pillar of immigration policy. As such, we are concerned that, under current immigration laws, relatives of legal U.S. residents often wait years, even decades, before their visas are processed and decisions issued. In addition, some close relatives are ineligible for visas because of restrictive language in the current law. These long delays and bars to family reunification disserve the stability and well-being of American communities.

H.R.2709 seeks to address these flaws in the family immigration system. Specifically, H.R.2709 would reclassify spouses and children of legal immigrants as immediate relatives; raise the per-country immigration limits from 7 percent to 10 percent of total admissions for certain family-based immigrant visa categories to reduce current backlogs; recapture family-based visas that went unused in previous years due to bureaucratic errors; allow widows and spouses to remain eligible for visas after the death of a sponsoring family member; grant the Attorney General greater discretion to address family hardships; and make same-sex permanent partners eligible for family immigration purposes.

Family unity has long been a fundamental principle of U.S. immigration policy, and we believe that it must remain a critical component of our country's immigration system. The immigration system should, accordingly, be reformed to reunite all types of families as quickly as possible. In providing for such reform, the Reuniting Families Act would alleviate pressure on U.S. borders, allow more immigrants to utilize legal immigration channels, and foster the development of vibrant American communities—all in consonance with core American and Jewish family values.

In sum, we strongly urge you to join with the 55 original co-sponsors as a co-sponsor of the Reuniting Families Act (H.R.2709). Thank you for considering our views on this important matter.

Respectfully,

Richard T. Foltin
Legislative Director and Counsel