



Reuniting Families Act (H.R. 2709) Bill Summary

In June 2009, Congressman Mike Honda (D-Calif.) introduced this legislation that would reform America's family-based immigration system to end lengthy separations of loved ones, promote family stability and foster the economic growth that immigrant families have provided throughout our history. Due to current long waits, many family members who apply for visas in the prime of their lives are not granted admissions until they reach retirement age, undermining their economic contribution to our country and encouraging some frustrated relatives to resort to illegal migration. The current system has not been updated in 20 years—it keeps individuals apart from spouses, children and parents for years and even decades, despite the fact that the family has played by the rules. This bill would take important steps toward fixing our broken family immigration system. Specifically, the Reuniting Families Act would:

- **Reclaim family- and employment-based visas that remain unused from previous years:** Unused and unclaimed visas from 1992 to 2007 would be placed back into the pool of current visas for families and employers to utilize, and unused visas in the future fiscal years would “roll over” to the next year.
- **Allow green card holders to reunite with their spouses and minor children:** The bill classifies the children of spouses of green card holders as “immediate relatives.” This would allow spouses and children of green card holders to immediately qualify for a visa.
- **Increase the per country limits of family- and employment-based visas from:** Each country currently only has a 7% share of the total cap on visas that Congress allocates each year. Small countries and large countries get the same percentage under current law. Increasing each country's percentage of visas to 10% would reduce the absurdly long wait times for individuals to immigrate from large countries like China and India.
- **Allow widows and widowers to immigrate despite death of a sponsor:** Every year, a number of immigrants are deported because the U.S. citizen or green card holder relative who sponsored them has died before the government adjudicated their applications. The bill addresses the immigration-related hardships caused by these family tragedies by clarifying that the government should continue to process the applications of immigrants who are already in line to receive a family visa at the time of their sponsoring relative's death.
- **Promote family unity by allowing more people to use the system:** The bill would allow more people to use our family system by giving the Attorney General more power to waive barriers for immigrants who have been unlawfully present in the past. Similar to other provisions in current law, this provision allows an already eligible individual to immigrate to the U.S. if he or she demonstrates hardship to a family member or eligibility for an immigrant visa.
- **Recognize the sacrifices that certain World War II Filipino veterans made for this country by exempting their children from the numerical caps on visas.**
- **Eliminates discrimination facing LGBT families in the family system:** The bill incorporates the Uniting American Families Act, which allows gay and lesbian Americans and immigrants to sponsor their partners and partners' children for immigration to the U.S.