

June 21, 2013

Dear Senator:

We, the undersigned organizations that advocate on behalf of women, children and families, urge you to support Hirono #1504, co-sponsored by Senators Hirono, Murray, Baldwin, Boxer, Cantwell, Gillibrand, Klobuchar, Landrieu, Leahy, Mikulski, Murkowski, Shaheen, Stabenow and Warren. Hirono #1504 goes to the heart of making the immigration system fair and inclusive by adding a new tier to the proposed merit-based system that is more inclusive of women's contributions.

We are all deeply committed to ensuring that any immigration reform bill treats women fairly and acknowledges the many specific situations and contributions of women. We believe that the proposed merit-based system for employment green cards in S.744, as currently written, will significantly disadvantage women who want to come to this country, particularly unmarried women. Awarding points primarily for education and employment experience fails to recognize the lack of opportunities and barriers that women face in accessing both education and employment in their home countries, barriers that are significantly worse than for men. This, in effect, cements into U.S. immigration law barriers and inequities that women face in their home countries and inadvertently restricts the opportunities available to women across the globe.

Currently, approximately 70% of immigrant women come to this country through the family-based system. Employment-based visas favor men over women by nearly a four to one margin because U.S. immigration law places a premium placed on male-dominated fields like engineering and computer science. However, women perform essential work as primary caregivers, domestic workers, in-home health care workers and nurses. They also are often the backbone of families, taking care of those in an extended family who are ill or unable to care for themselves. Economically, women are increasingly the primary breadwinners in immigrant families, making it more likely for the family to open a small business or purchase a home. Women are also the primary drivers of immigrant integration for the entire family, encouraging others to learn English and integrate effectively into the community.

We believe that Hirono #1504 is essential to ensuring that we do not inadvertently cement discrimination against women into U.S. immigration law. The amendment would establish a Tier 3 merit-based point system that would provide a fair opportunity for women to compete for merit-based green cards. Complementary to the high-skilled Tier 1 and the lower-skilled Tier 2, the new Tier 3 would include professions commonly held by women so as not to limit women's opportunities for economic-focused immigration. It would provide 30,000 Tier 3 visas and would not reduce the visas available in the other merit-based Tiers.

America has always held out hope and opportunity to millions of women across the world. Women move here to make life better for themselves and their families. They move seeking freedom and opportunity often denied in other places. As Americans, we honor and celebrate our unique commitment to protecting families and giving equal opportunities and respect to women and girls. We need our immigration system to reflect that commitment, and to provide opportunities to everyone, including women.

We urge you to support Hirono #1504 and help ensure fairness for women in immigration reform. If you have any questions, please contact Pramila Jayapal at We Belong Together: Women for Common-Sense Immigration Reform at pjayapal@me.com or June Zeitlin at The Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights at zeitlin@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

18MillionRising.org

9to5

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas

ALIGN New York

Alliance for a Just Society

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

American Jewish Committee

Asian American Justice Center

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Breakthrough

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice

Campaign for Community Change (CCC)

Capuchin Justice and Peace Office

Carmelites, Vedruna ICJP

Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies

Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.

Chinese American planning council, inc.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee and Immigration Ministries

Church World Service

CLUE Santa Barbara

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights

Communication Workers of America

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

CUNY Law Immigrant Initiatives

Daughters of Wisdom

Dominican Sisters of Houston

DRUM -Desis Rising Up & Moving

Family Values @ Work Consortium

Farmworker Justice

Feminist Majority

Franciscan Action Network

Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights

Good Shepherd Immigration Study Group

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota

Immigration Equality Action Fund

Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI)

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)

Japanese American Citizens League

Justice and Peace Committee, Sisters of St. Joseph of West Hartford CT

Korean Americans for Political Advancement (KAPA)

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Leadership Conference of Women Religious
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
MinKwon Center for Community Action
MomsRising.org
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NLDON)
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Employment Law Project
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Women's Law Center
OCA-NY Asian Pacific American Advocates
OneAmerica
Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters
PICO National Network
Presentation Sisters
Religious Sisters of Charity
School Sisters of Notre Dame JPIC Office Atlantic-Midwest Province
Sisters of Mercy
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community
Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin, OH
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Tahirih Justice Center
Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition
The Advocates for Human Rights
The Episcopal Church
The New American Leaders Project
Unid@s
Union of sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, US Province
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Methodist Women
Violence Intervention Program
West Michigan Coalition for Immigration Reform
We Belong Together Campaign
Women's Refugee Commission