

Dear Members of the California Congressional Delegation:

We write to you as members and advocates of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities who are concerned about the state of our immigration system. Our organizations represent AAPI communities across the state of California and serve well-established communities that have been settled for generations as well as recent new comers, struggling to integrate into the fabric of American life. Our broken immigration system threatens the livelihood of all our communities and we call on you and the entire California Congressional delegation to move forward key changes to our immigration system. As Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders we stand in solidarity with all immigrant communities in demanding fair and humane immigration reform.

While our communities are diverse in language, culture and history, we are united in our need and demand for immigration reform. As a nation, we face dire economic times, yet we continue to allocate billions of dollars for immigration enforcement without addressing the fundamental problems of our system. America needs a fair and effective immigration reform that recognizes the role immigrants play in helping to put the economy back on its feet and enables our communities to fully participate. The following describes key principles we as Asian Americans hope to see incorporated into a reform package this year:

Keep Families Together Many AAPI families are forced to wait decades to be reunited with their loved ones. Chinese, Indian and Filipino families, among others, all face wait times of over ten years to be reunited with members of their families stuck in the immigration backlog, while others resort to coming without papers or overstaying visas to join their families due to the lack of legal channels. Within our communities, an estimated 1.5 million people live without documentation. Among Korean Americans, for example, roughly one in five is undocumented¹. A recent report by the University of California's Office of the President revealed that nearly 44 percent of undocumented students are Asian². In addition, according to the 2000 US Census, an estimated 40,000 same-sex bi-national couples and their children currently live together in the US and have no standing in US immigration law³. Such families are completely shut out of the family immigration system. Furthermore, punitive immigration laws have torn apart AAPI families and communities. Immigrants who have established roots in the United States, including legal permanent residents, are being detained and deported for minor infractions. This is especially true for the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander communities, where many young Cambodian Americans, Tongans and Fijians are being repatriated often to lands which many of them never knew. **An immigration reform that protects and strengthens family unity will include a path to citizenship for the**

¹ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2008

² Chan, B. "Not 'A Mexican Thing': Undocumented Asian students face stigma and lack of financial aid, job experience." Asian Week. October 13, 2008. Available online.

³ Human Rights Watch and Immigration Equality. "Family Unvalued: Discrimination, Denial, and the fate of Binational Same-Sex Couples under U.S. Law." New York: 2006.

undocumented, eliminate visa backlogs, will preserve and strengthen the family immigration system including expanding the definition of family to include same-sex couples and will stop the unjust detention and deportation of immigrants and refugees.

Protect Rights and Liberties Historically, immigrant communities have been scapegoats for our country's economic and political problems, from the nineteenth century exclusion of Chinese immigrants to the World War II internment of Japanese Americans to the post-9/11 Special Registration Program targeting South Asian and Muslim men. For the last several years, enforcement measures such as raids and selective enforcement have targeted and terrorized many of our communities. The rollback of civil liberties has had a disparate impact upon AAPIs who have faced sweeping detentions and deportations often without access to fair hearings or legal representation. In 2008, without the input of communities, advocates or Congress, USCIS signed a repatriation agreement with Vietnam which subjects certain Vietnamese nationals to repatriation to a land many of them have never known. **An immigration reform must uphold the American values of justice and liberty by protecting the rights of all workers regardless of immigration status, restoring due process and civil liberties in the immigration system and ending the criminalization of immigrants.**

Provide Opportunities for Integration America has long been celebrated as a nation of immigrants. But in earlier American history, the task of effectively integrating immigrants was taken up by strong networks of social institutions.⁴ Many of these institutions have weakened overtime, but the need for immigrant integration is great. Many AAPI communities face linguistic isolation and in a system where demand regularly outweighs supply, as evidenced by long waitlists, accessing English language classes is difficult. In addition, over the last several years barriers have been placed along the road to citizenship, including increases in naturalization fees, delays in background checks and changes in the naturalization exam. In California, this process has been further destabilized with the decimation of the Naturalization Services Program, which provided legal services and support for immigrants looking to naturalize. **An immigration reform that values the special contributions that immigrants make, will invest in immigrant communities by promoting education, naturalization and civic participation for the mutual interest and benefit of America.**

As Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, we call on you as our representative and our leader to enact immigration reform legislation this year. The continued failure to systemically address major aspects of immigration law and policy has resulted in a system that is bad for the economy, undercuts laws that protect workers, undermines security, and wastes human potential. We look forward to working with you to develop a policy that keeps families together, protects the rights and liberties of all people living in the United States and provides opportunities for the integration of immigrant communities.

⁴ Pastor, M. & Ortiz, R. "Immigrant Integration in Los Angeles: Strategic Directions for Funder". University of Southern California commissioned by the California Community Foundation. January 2009.

Sincerely,

API Equality – San Francisco
Asian American Action Fund – California Chapter
Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Inc. (AADAP)
Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality (AACRE)
Asian Americans for Community Involvement (AACI)
Asian American Justice Center (AAJC)
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Law Caucus (ALC)
Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Los Angeles County (APABA)
Asian Pacific American Legal Outreach (API Legal Outreach)
Asian Pacific Americans for Progress (APAP)
Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California (APALC)
Asian & Pacific Islander Obesity Prevention Alliance (APIOPA)
Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council (A3PCON)
Asian and Pacific Islanders California Action Network (APIsCAN)
California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC)
Cambodian Community Development
Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC)
Family Bridges, Inc.
Filipino American Service Group, Inc. (FASGI)
Fresno Center for New Americans
Guam Communications Network
Japanese American Citizens League, Pacific Southwest Office (JACL)
Korean American Bar Association of Southern California (KABA)
Korean Resource Center (KRC)
Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum – DC National Office (NAPAWF)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum - Los Angeles Chapter
(NAPAWF)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum - Bay Area Chapter (NAPAWF)
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
NICOS Chinese Health Coalition
Organization of Chinese Americans – Orange County Chapter (OCA-OC)
Pacific Asian Counseling Services (PACS)
PALS for Health
Pilipino Workers' Center
Philippine American Bar Association (PABA)
Refugee Forum of Orange County
Services, Immigrant Rights, & Education Network (SIREN)
Sikh Coalition
Southeast Asian Task Force

Thai Health & Information Services, Inc.
Tongan Community Service Center
United Cambodian Community
Visitation Valley Asians Alliance (VVAA)

Individuals

Kent Wong, Director, UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education
Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley, Founding Executive Director, Fresno Interdenominational
Refugee Ministries, Inc. (FIRM)
Diane Ujjiye, Director, Asian and Pacific Islanders California Action Network
(APIsCAN)

Signatories as of April 20, 2009