



# UNITED STATES SENATE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **MAZIE K. HIRONO, SIX OTHER SENATORS URGE GANG OF EIGHT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR FAMILIES TO BE REUNITED THROUGH IMMIGRATION REFORM**

Washington, D.C. -- Today, U.S. Senators Mazie K. Hirono (HI), Barbara Boxer (CA), Sherrod Brown (OH), Tom Harkin (IA), Brian Schatz (HI), Al Franken (MN), and Elizabeth Warren (MA) urged the Gang of Eight currently drafting immigration reform legislation to prioritize family reunification and clear the backlogs of family visas in a letter today. The senators specifically urged their colleagues to keep categories that allow for immigrants to call their brothers and sisters and adult children to this country.

“As you work on your draft legislation, however, we urge you to prioritize clearing the backlog of family visas and ensuring that going forward the reformed system makes it easier for people to be united with their families, including their brothers and sisters and their adult children,” the senators wrote.

The senators continued, “According to a recent media report, the proposed bill would eliminate family-based admission categories for the married adult children and siblings of U.S. citizens. This is very troubling. Different types of family members can play an important role in each other’s lives, and for some Americans a brother or sister is the only family they have.”

The senators also argued that family immigration should not be overshadowed by employment-based immigration, noting that studies have shown that family based immigrants add to the economy directly and through their support of other working family members.

“In other words, family-based immigration should not be considered less important than employment-based immigration. Both are vital to our country’s future. In fact, weakening the family immigration system will make it harder for employers to attract talented workers from abroad. Those foreign-born scientists and engineers have families, too,” the senators wrote.

Full text of the letter is below:

Dear Senators Bennet, Durbin, Flake, Graham, McCain, Menendez, Rubio, and Schumer:

We greatly respect and admire your perseverance and dedication in negotiating an immigration reform package that balances the demands of numerous competing interests, seeking to find solutions that create a pathway to citizenship, strengthen our economy, and protect the safety and integrity of our borders. As you work on your draft legislation, however, we urge you to prioritize clearing the backlog of family visas and ensuring that going forward the reformed system makes it easier for people to be united with their families, including their brothers and sisters and their adult children.

According to a recent media report, the proposed bill would eliminate family-based admission categories for the married adult children and siblings of U.S. citizens. This is very troubling. Different types of family members can play an important role in each other's lives, and for some Americans a brother or sister is the only family they have.

Family based immigration is important not only to individual citizens, but to the social and economic well-being of the country as a whole. The available evidence suggests that family based immigrants add to the economy directly and through their support of other working family members. Family based immigrants bring vital skills and new ideas to this country, increase the likelihood of successful integration of new immigrants through family support networks, and over time show more upward mobility than any other immigrant group. In other words, family-based immigration should not be considered less important than employment-based immigration. Both are vital to our country's future.

In fact, weakening the family immigration system will make it harder for employers to attract talented workers from abroad. Those foreign-born scientists and engineers have families, too.

It has been twenty-three years since Congress increased the total number of permanent visas available to family and employment based immigrants. The demand for those visas far exceeds the supply, leading to backlogs in processing that have kept family members separated for decades. The solution to the problem is not to cut existing categories of family-based visas, but to create a more flexible and generous system that focuses less on quotas and limits and more on opportunities and possibilities.

We are a nation of immigrants, and our immigration system must be responsive to the best of our American values and principles, honoring the drive, creativity, and determination that brings immigrants to our shores. Thus, you are not just negotiating over numbers, but over the people and the values and the loved ones we hold dear. Please keep this in mind as your negotiations continue and we urge you to include in your legislation a plan to keep family immigration strong.

Sincerely,

Mazie K. Hirono  
Sherrod Brown  
Brian Schatz  
Elizabeth Warren

Barbara Boxer  
Tom Harkin  
Al Franken