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National South Asian Organization Applauds Introduction of Legislation Reuniting Immigrant Families

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South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), a national organization whose mission is to elevate the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations to build a more just and inclusive society, applauds the reintroduction of the “*Reuniting Families Act*” on May 5 in the U.S. House of Representatives. This bill is a crucial step towards alleviating severe backlogs in the processing of family and employment-based visas that have long affected the lives of South Asian community members in this country.

South Asians in the United States are a predominantly foreign-born community that confronts a range of obstacles navigating the immigration system. Such challenges include U.S. citizens and green card holders waiting years to bring sponsored loved ones living abroad to the United States. According to the U.S. Department of State in November 2010, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh rank among the top ten countries with largest number of applicants awaiting family immigrant visas. Delays can last years for South Asian families; for example, a U.S. citizen sponsoring a sibling in India must often wait 11 years before receiving a green card. Being separated from loved ones takes a significant toll on South Asian community members in the U.S. by denying them the financial and emotional support structure needed for immigrants in this country.

The *Reuniting Families Act* provides much-needed workable solutions towards reducing the immense family-based and employment-based visa backlog, including provisions that would:

- Recapture unused family-based and employment-based visas allocated from previous years to be applied towards the current visa backlog
- Classify children and spouses of green card holders as “immediate relatives”, thus allowing them to immediately qualify for a visa
- Raise per-country limits of family and employment-based visas from 7% to 10%, thus decreasing the wait times for applicants from countries with significant immigration, including South Asian countries
- Grant the Attorney General of the U.S. Department of Justice greater flexibility to consider family separation various hardships for individuals unlawfully present in the United States
- Ends discrimination in immigration law by allowing U.S. citizens and green card holders in same-sex permanent relationships to sponsor partners abroad

“Keeping families together has been the cornerstone of this country’s immigration system. Insufficient numbers of visas and inefficiencies in terms of processing applications have kept South Asian community members apart from their loved ones for far too long. Spouses, partners, parents, children, and siblings have been separated from each other, thus preventing many from living full and productive lives in this country. This legislation is a much needed solution towards promoting family unity and a vital step towards broader immigration reform towards broader immigration reform that will benefit the South Asian community and the entire country,” said Deepa Iyer, SAALT’s Executive Director.

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