

Volume 1, Issue 3—March 2006

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Welcome to the third issue of the *UniteFamilies.org* newsletter. This month, we cover the immigration reform bill introduced by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA), recent meetings of our members with lawmakers and new articles in the media on the family separation problem of U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs). As always, we urge all our readers to contact their Representatives and Senators, educate them about the problem, and request their support.

Specter's bill

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter (R-PA) unveiled his immigration reform proposal on Thursday, February 23. It combines enhanced enforcement with a temporary guest-worker program as well as an opportunity for millions of undocumented immigrants here to become legal workers.

The family unity provisions were mostly taken from the McCain/Kennedy bill (S. 1033). It increases the number of immigrant visas that are available to spouses and children of LPRs. The section-by-section summary is available on the AILA website. The February 2006 version

of the text of the bill is available on the website of immigration attorney Carl Shusterman.

In brief, the bill contains the following provisions for nuclear families of LPRs:

- Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens will no longer consume immigrant visas from the 480,000 visas available to all family classes each year. Currently, because of the high demand by immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, family preference categories are getting only the minimum guaranteed 226,000 visas per year.
- Unused visas from 2001–2005 will be recaptured.
- Unused visas from a given year will be available the next year.
- Visas will be redistributed among the preference categories. Family second preference will get 50% of the available visas of which 77% will continue to be available to spouses and children of permanent residents (F2A).
- 75% of F2A is exempt from per-country limits as before. The remaining 25% will be subject to a 10% per-country limit as opposed to the current 7%.

Ignoring the recapture of visas, this means that 77% of 50% of 480,000 visas will be available to F2A beneficiaries each year. This adds up to 184,800. Currently, only 87,900 visas are available to F2A beneficiaries each year. Thus, F2A visa supply will more than double. If recaptured visas are included, this increases even more.

Despite these rather optimistic estimates, a few potential problems may arise. First, these

provisions may disappear in the final bill. Contact your Senators to ensure that this does not happen. Second, the demand for F2A visas can also increase due to the dual-intent temporary worker visas (H2C) also introduced in the bill. Third, the increased load on the USCIS and the State Department can cause significant processing delays. With such potential drawbacks, it appears that H.R. 1823 still remains the best solution for nuclear families of LPRs as it promises unification in 6–9 months.

Meetings with Lawmakers

Ekaterina Atanasova, one of our members who is separated from her husband, met with her Congressman Tom Allen (D-ME) last month. During the meeting, Rep. Allen showed his strong support of our goals and agreed to co-sponsor H.R. 1823.

Amir Riahi met Sen. Martinez's (R-FL) legislative aide on February 22. Senator Martinez's staff was very receptive and interested in working with our group to help unite LPR nuclear families. Senator Martinez is a cosponsor of the McCain/Kennedy bill (S. 1033). Amir urged the Senator (through the aide) to support family unity by cosponsoring any bill that would reduce the backlog for F2A visas, such as Sen. Hagel's S. 1919. We expect to hear from Sen. Martinez's office about his decision regarding S. 1919.

Ricardo Lu met with Sen. Lamar Alexander's (R-TN) staff on March 7 in Tennessee. We will keep you posted on the future development of this contact.

These meetings show that lawmakers are willing to meet and listen to their constituents. We urge members to get in touch with their law-

makers and talk to them about our issue. The core group can provide support to individuals who need assistance in this undertaking. This includes preparing the presentation materials, writing letters, and advising on how to talk to lawmakers. Please step forward and get in touch with your representatives.

Media Coverage

Ekaterina Atanasova was featured in an article that appeared in The Portsmouth Herald.

Ekaterina also wrote an article, "No family values for immigrants," in the SeaCoastNH that further highlighted our issue.

We urge all affected people to write to their local newspapers. The more people know about the family separation, the more likely we will get support and possible resolution of the problem.

Group Statistics

Below, we compare the current group statistics (as of March 11) with those from a month ago.

<i>Item</i>	<i>2/11</i>	<i>3/11</i>
Online petition signatures	1,331	1,462
Paper petition signatures	173	173
Home page visits	9,071	9,786
Discussion group members	657	673
Co-sponsors H.R. 1823	10	11
Co-sponsors S. 1919	None	None
Co-sponsors H.R. 4448	7	9

Statistics on how F2A visa cutoff dates progressed according to the March and April State Department Visa Bulletins are summarized below.

<i>Item</i>	<i>3/06 Cutoff</i>	<i>4/06 Cutoff</i>
Other countries	2/22/02	3/1/02
Mexico	5/15/99	6/15/99

We urge you to sign our online petition to Congress if you have not already done so. Please sign the English or the Spanish petition. English: <http://petitiononline.com/unitefam>; Spanish: <http://petitiononline.com/unirfami>. Our home page is at <http://unitefamilies.org>. If you are not a member of our discussion group, consider joining. The group is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unitefamilies> and you can join by filling the form at <http://unitefamilies.org/action/join.html>.

Call to Action

Talk to Media

We are very excited to inform our members that *National Public Radio* (NPR) is interested in doing an in-depth *NPR is interested!* feature on the problem of unclear family separation of LPRs.

Being the premier radio network in the U.S., this will significantly raise awareness nationwide. This is our opportunity to be heard.

Some of our members have already been interviewed by NPR. But we need more people for interviews. NPR is interested in affected members that fit the following profile:

- Married LPR separated from spouse or child.
- LPR resides in the Washington D.C., Atlanta, San Francisco Bay Area, or surrounding areas.
- Spouse lives in India, Mexico, or Phillipines.

If you fit the profile, please let us know right away. You can reach us by email at <mailto:info@unitefamilies.org>. The producer and reporter will come to your location in the U.S. to interview you. They will then travel abroad to interview your spouse. These interviews will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be edited and formed into a program detailing our issue. There is no better opportunity to be heard. NPR has a huge listener base. This is our chance!

The *Los Angeles Times* is interested in writing an article on our issue and would like to interview Southern California residents who are affected by the problem. If you are from Southern California, please contact Arin Gencer of the *Times* by phone at 213-237-7244 or by email <mailto:arin.gencer@latimes.com>.

Contact your Lawmakers

We cannot emphasize more that it is critical for lawmakers to hear from their affected constituents. The more constituents they hear from, the more likely they will act to fix the problem. There is no adverse consequence in contacting a lawmaker.

When attempting to arrange a meeting with a lawmaker, persistence pays off. A single letter or phone call usually does not get their attention. In our experience, repeated attempts to contact our Congresspersons and Senators result in meetings.

We can help with the presentation materials and meeting preparation. However, you need to take the initiative to contact your lawmaker.

Nothing is going to happen to fix our problem until each one of us plays a more active role. Write to your Congressperson and Senators. Write again and request a meeting. Call their offices and ask them to support H.R. 1823,

S. 1919, H.R. 4448 or Specter's bill. Write to your local newspaper, radio and TV stations requesting an article or segment highlighting our problem. Ask your spouse to join our Yahooogroup. Every action by every member counts.

Call for donation

Please donate! We are critically short of funds and are unable to pay our PR firm. You can

donate to *UniteFamilies.org* by writing us a check or by PayPal; the instructions are on our website (<http://unitefamilies.org/action/donate.html>).¹

Consider this as an investment—the time and money saved in avoiding frequent travel to be united with your spouse and children will more than compensate the donation.

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¹We are *not* a 501(c)(3) registered charity, so donations are *not* tax deductible. Accounts of donations received are tabulated in the database section of our Yahoo group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unitefamilies>).