



Asian Pacific American Legal Center
1145 Wilshire Blvd., Second Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 977-7500 • Fax (213) 977-7595

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Sara Sadhwani
(213) 241-0271 or sara@apalc.org

ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER ORGANIZATIONS IN CALIFORNIA UNITE TO DEMAND FAIR & HUMANE IMMIGRATION REFORM

LOS ANGELES, August 17, 2009 – Today in Historic Filipinotown, Asian and Pacific Islander (API) organizations called on the Obama Administration and Congress for enact fair and humane comprehensive immigration reform.

In simultaneous press conferences held in Los Angeles and San Francisco, community leaders and members kicked off the National API Week of Action, shedding light on how the immigration system affects API immigrants and their families. This week of action (August 17-22) uplifts API voices in the national debate on immigration reform.

“The time has come for us to mobilize and let other Americans know how the broken immigration system is undermining Asian American and Pacific Islander families and communities,” said Stewart Kwoh, Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center. “Any reform of the immigration laws must fully incorporate our shared American values of family, human rights, civil liberties, and due process.”

Titi Liu, Executive Director of the Asian Law Caucus, explains, “We add our voices to the call for comprehensive immigration reform. For this national week of action, we tell our stories as immigrants and as descendants of immigrants to build America’s future together. Asian American immigrants are an integral part of America – we are workers, neighbors, and small business owners who revitalize communities and contribute to the economy.”

Family reunification is the primary reason APIs come to the U.S., but API families suffer some of the worst immigration backlogs. “Filipinos must wait up to 22 years for an immigrant visa to join their family members in the U.S.,” said Sherwin Shakramy, Program Development Coordinator of the Filipino American Service Group, Inc. “This long separation of families is unacceptable - we want efficient and timely processing of visas that facilitate the reunification of families.”

Eileen Ma of API-Equality, Los Angeles, also states, “We need to provide a pathway to legalization for the 35,000 bi-national same sex couples currently living here. U.S. immigration policy is largely based on the principle of family reunification, allowing for the sponsor of spouses and other family members for immigration purposes. But because of a limited definition of family and the failure to recognize same-sex marriages, same-sex partners of U.S. citizens and green card holders are not considered as family. API couples are more likely to be kept apart, torn apart, or forced to stay together illegally, because of high numbers of foreign-born individuals in the API community.”

Dae Joong Yoon, Executive Director of the Korean Resource Center, added, “The Asian American and Pacific Islander community supports a path to citizenship for the undocumented so that all can fully participate in our society. In the Korean American community alone, one in five is undocumented with many under the age of 18. We have dealt with cases of parents of U.S. citizen children who have been deported, or undocumented immigrants living in constant fear of deportation, and bright students blocked from achieving their dreams.”

Brian Hui, Policy Manager of the Tongan Community Center, said, “Although the U.S. economy relies on immigrant workers, many of our workers are exploited and intimidated, because they lack the proper legal documentation. Everyday, we hear of stories of immigrants, including naturalized citizens, being unfairly treated by their employers due to E-Verify, and other employment verification systems. All API workers regardless of immigration status deserve dignity in their jobs and the full protection of U.S. labor laws.”

API families have been separated by not only the lack of opportunities for legalization and long backlogs, but also by the unjust detention and deportation of immigrants. Sara Pol Lim, Executive Director of United Cambodian Community notes, “Many Cambodian Americans, especially Cambodian youth, are torn away from families, repatriated often to lands which many of them never knew. Our immigration system should not punish families who have experienced tragedy in their personal lives and are trying to reform their lives here in America. It is troubling that most detained immigrants, including elderly women, youth and asylum seekers, are held in jail-style facilities converted or contracted for immigration purposes – where they often are denied access to proper medical care.”

Since the passage of anti-immigrant legislation by Congress in 1996, the rollback of civil liberties and civil rights has had a disparate impact upon APIs. Ethnic and racial profiling in the name of national security have criminalized communities and destroyed families. “In the aftermath of 9/11, the South Asian community bore the brunt of repressive immigration enforcement tactics and policies. We need to stop sweeping detentions and deportations where immigrants are often without access to fair hearings,” said Tamia Pervez, Policy Organizer for the South Asian Network. “The API community demands that every person have the right to due process and fair hearings.”

Tom Hayashi, President of the Organization of Chinese Americans, notes, “We need to also provide more opportunity for our community to become more integrated into American society. Demand outweighs supply for high quality English language programs, where there are long waitlists for such classes. There are also barriers placed along the road to citizenship, with increases in naturalization fees, delays in background checks and changes in the naturalization exam. We need to remove these barriers so that our community can receive the language and skills training they need to maximize their social and economic contributions to our society.”

Sara Sadhwani, Director of the Immigrant Rights Project at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, said, “APIs are growing in strength, in numbers and in political power. The number of API voters increased by 21.3% from 2.8 million in 2004 to 3.4 million in 2008. In 6 of the 9 states that went from ‘red’ to ‘blue’ in the 2008 election (Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Nevada, New Mexico, and North Carolina), API voters helped to tip the balance for Obama over McCain. This week, we will flex our political muscle through legislative visits, a postcard campaign, a texting day, and posts through blogging networks.”

The represented organizations are part of a statewide movement of about 50 API organizations in support of comprehensive immigration reform. Earlier in April, they sent a letter addressed to the California Congressional Delegation, describing key principles they hope to see in an immigration reform package. To receive a copy, contact Connie Choi at (213) 241-0267 or cchoi@apalc.org.

###