



## **Reuniting Families Act of 2024: Bill Summary**

Senator Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) together with Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) introduced the Reuniting Families Act of 2024 in the Senate on December 4, 2024, an update of a [previous bill](#) introduced in 2009. Representative Judy Chu (D-California) reintroduced the House counterpart, the [Reuniting Families Act of 2023](#) (H.R. 5560), on September 19, 2023, having previously introduced a version of the bill in 2019. The House bill, H.R. 5560, currently has forty co-sponsors, all of whom are Democrats.

The Reuniting Families Act would protect families and provide numerous fixes to a family immigration system that has not been substantially reformed in over thirty years. There are [nearly 4 million](#) people with approved applications caught up in family immigration backlogs and some have waited for [more than a decade](#) to be reunited with their families. Among other things, the bill would recapture immigrant visas by rolling them over into future years and expand eligibility of family members to include permanent partners who would qualify as “immediate relatives,” therefore excluding them from counting under the annual visa caps. The bill would additionally increase the number of available visas and raise per-country visa limits.

### **What the Reuniting Families Act would do**

- The Reuniting Families Act would recapture immigrant visas, specifically family sponsored immigrant visas and employment-based immigrant visas, which went unallocated between 1992 and 2023, rolling them over into the next fiscal year in the same visa category. The bill establishes recapture and rollover on an ongoing basis, any recaptured visas will continue to roll over until they are allocated.
- The bill would also increase visa access for family members who have an approved application and have been waiting for more than ten years, allowing them to qualify immediately for employment-sponsored and family-based visas without counting them against the numerical limitations of those visas. Under the bill, beneficiaries (including derivative beneficiaries, who have waited more than ten years from when they submitted a visa application) would not be subject to the numerical limitations of those visas.
- It would allow spouses, permanent partners, and minor children (under 21) of lawful permanent residents to be considered “[immediate relatives](#)” and therefore be immediately eligible for a lawful permanent resident visa (Green Card). This expands on the current definition by adding [permanent partners](#) (Sec. 201), defined as “a committed, intimate relationship,” to the category of immediate relatives.
- The bill would significantly increase the annual number of available family preference visas, adjusting allocations as follows:

- Increasing allocated visas for U.S. citizens' unmarried sons and daughters from 23,400 to 127,200.
- Increasing allocated visas for U.S. citizens' married sons and daughters from 23,400 to 80,640.
- Increasing allocated visas for U.S. citizens' brothers and sisters from 65,000 to 191,520.
- The bill would raise per-country visa limits from 7% for a single foreign state to 20%, and from 2% for a dependent area to 5%. A dependent area is defined as a colony or territory that lacks full sovereignty or political independence. This increase applies to every foreign state and dependent area.
- It would increase the number of diversity visas from 55,000 every fiscal year to 80,000 every fiscal year. This would not be a one-time increase but an increase for every fiscal year going forward.
- The bill would set a 10-year time limit on visa processing to eliminate indefinite waits by applicants.
- It would protect children of visa-holders – so-called Documented Dreamers – from aging out of dependent status while waiting in existing USCIS backlogs.
- It would increase the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) discretion and flexibility to utilize "[Cancellation of Removal](#)" to keep families together, circumventing [immigration bars](#) in situations where hardship exceptions are appropriate.
- The bill would extend protections to same sex partners of citizens, legal permanent residents, refugees, and asylum grantees.
- It would provide relief to widows, widowers, and orphans with pending applications at the time of a sponsoring relative's death.

### **How would the Reuniting Families Act would be beneficial**

- **Significantly reforms the family-based immigration system for the first time in over 30 years.** The last time significant changes were made to U.S. family-based immigration was the [Immigration Act of 1990, more than three decades ago](#). This outdated system includes long wait times and overly restrictive country caps, placing harmful burdens on those seeking to live and work in the United States and harming our economy and undermining family unity. Current bottlenecks in our family-based immigration system have led to a backlog of over four million people who have already been approved, many of which are waiting to be reunited with their families. Some of these individuals have waited 20 years or longer and others [will die before they are eligible to be reunited with family](#). Enacting the Reuniting Families Act would represent an overdue and essential step to address the backlogs and inefficiencies within our current family-based immigration system that keeps families apart.

- **Promotes the value of families.** [Family-based immigration](#) remains an essential cornerstone of our legal immigration system. Family members serve as an important [social network](#) that assists in the process of integration by providing social, psychological, and economic support for newly arrived relatives. Such assistance can allow others in the family to work and thus contribute more to the U.S. economy. In addition, immigrant family members and immigrant communities generally encourage development of human capital and support forming businesses by providing capital or loans, reinforcing the positive economic contributions of the broader immigrant community.
- **Reunites family members.** Under our current dysfunctional immigration system, some U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents are forced to wait [decades](#) to be reunited with a sibling or unmarried son or daughter. This situation is unworkable and untenable. By recapturing unused visas and reducing backlogs, the Reuniting Families Act attempts to address this ongoing barrier to family unity.