

# **FILIPINO VETERANS FAMILY REUNIFICATION ACT OF 2023**

## **Introduced by Senator Hirono**

More than 260,000 Filipino soldiers heeded America's call to join the war effort in World War II, at great sacrifice. At the time, the Philippines was a U.S. territory. Following World War II, Filipino veterans were denied many of the benefits offered to other veterans from the war.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush granted U.S. citizenship to about 26,000 Filipino nationals who served in World War II. Over thirty years later, it is estimated that there are less than two thousand Filipino veterans who are still alive and living in the United States.

**The Problem:** The 1990 law did not confer citizenship or residency to the veterans' children. Therefore, the veterans' children are required to apply for family-based green cards under the annual country cap. Under that cap, only 7% of recipients are permitted to come from a single country. Because of the state of our country's visa backlog (of nearly four million people), Filipino applicants must wait decades before their applications can be considered.

In 2016, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services implemented the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole (FWVP) program to reunite veterans and their surviving spouses with their adult children. While the Trump Administration announced its intention to end this categorical parole program in August 2019, the Biden Administration has announced it is still accepting applications. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, applicants are experiencing extensive delays—and every week matters as dozens of the veterans are now over 100 years old. The current program leaves applicants without certainty: waiting for long processing times, needing to reapply every three years, and having to apply separately (with even more wait times) just to work while in the U.S.

**The Solution:** The Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act provides a permanent solution and certainty, amending the Immigration and Nationality Act to exempt from worldwide limitations the sons and daughters of Filipino World War II veterans who were naturalized under the 1990 law or other specified law. This change in law would benefit only a few thousand people, many of whom are already waiting in the visa application queue.

The bill has been introduced each Congress since the 110th Congress, and was introduced as a bipartisan bill in the 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, and 117th Congresses. The bill was also included in the Senate's 2013 bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill, S. 744. Senator Hirono offered the bill as an amendment to the comprehensive reform bill in the Judiciary Committee, which adopted the amendment by voice vote.

**Supporting Organizations:** Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO, Church World Service, Filipino Young Leaders Program, Human Rights First, Immigration Hub, Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio, Japanese American Citizens League, Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG), National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), National Immigration Forum, Pilipino Workers Center, PWC, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA), Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, UndocuBlack Network, Veterans for American Ideals, Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center.

Please contact Sitara Kedilaya (Sitara\_Kedilaya@hirono.senate.gov) if you have any questions or would like to cosponsor the Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act.

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