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**COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

**CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC
AMERICAN CAUCUS**
BOARD MEMBER

CHAIR
TASK FORCE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

May 6, 2013

**COMMITTEE ON
SMALL BUSINESS**
RANKING DEMOCRAT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CONTRACTING AND WORKFORCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, ENERGY AND TRADE
**HOUSE GUN VIOLENCE
PREVENTION TASK FORCE**

Dear Senator Schumer:

Thank you for your leadership in bringing the issue of immigration reform to the forefront of the national policy agenda. I commend you for your work with colleagues in the Senate to produce a serious proposal to reform the current immigration system and bring thousands of hard working immigrant families from across the nation out of the shadows. As the Senate debates and hopefully crafts this immigration reform bill into final legislation, I feel it is particularly important to be mindful of the needs of different immigrant communities across the country. As you know, the Asian American community is a valued source of diversity and an engine of economic growth, especially in New York City, where the Asian American community makes up over 13% of the total population.

There is very much to be admired in the Senate proposal that we look forward to vigorously advocating for in the House of Representatives. The inclusion of additional visas for a range of workers is long overdue and paves the way for innovation and growth in sectors that are vital to the future of the country - from seasonal agricultural work to high-skilled technology workers. New provisions that require legal counsel for vulnerable immigrant populations are a huge step towards ensuring that immigration laws are enforced in an efficient, humane and equitable manner. Additionally, the expanded implementation of the DREAM Act within the Senate proposal ensures that hard working young Americans, who remain undocumented due to no fault of their own, are provided with a dignified and expedited path to citizenship. All of these are long overdue and commendable improvements

In its current form, the Senate plan contains a number of provisions that are particularly disadvantageous to the Asian American community and detrimental to our immigration system and American economy at large. The Asian American community faces unique challenges that are not addressed in the current proposal and deserve further consideration. Asian American families, like all families, have a strong interest in ensuring that any comprehensive immigration bill retains provisions to enable all current family reunification pathways. Sixty percent of the current foreign-born population is Asian American. The proposed bill deemphasizes adult sibling and adult married child relationships in the formula that underpins the new family reunification process. The need for family reunification is foremost in the hearts of the Asian American community, and the underlying assumption that these particular family relationships are attenuated is simply false.

This shift in emphasis away from family reunification also discounts the long-term economic benefits of a family-focused immigration system. Although non-occupation based immigrants have overall lower initial earnings, they are also tied to faster earnings growth than employment-based immigrants and have been shown to level off within 11-18 years. Over the past ten years, US residents have sent over \$450 billion dollars in remittances to foreign countries. Much of this money goes to family members who cannot legally join their relatives in the United States. Making family reunification a priority would strengthen communities and would inject billions of dollars into our economy every year. Beyond the numbers, immigrants' relatives often provide an unpaid caregiver support system, pool extended family resources into business entrepreneurship, and facilitate long-term assimilation into American society.

I would also like to highlight serious concerns with the e-verify system. Anytime an employer holds power over an employee's immigration status, that employer has sweeping control and a serious potential for employee exploitation. This is a particular concern for low-income, transient, and new immigrants, who are less aware of their rights. In addition, the current E-Verify system relies on incomplete and outdated Department of Homeland Security and Social Security Administration databases that disproportionately affect naturalized citizens. Many Asian names are also not easily tracked within the existing E-Verify system, leading to erroneous outcomes for many Asian American workers. Further, the E-Verify system proposes significant challenges for immigrant business owners, who in 2009 made up almost half of all small business owners in New York City. Some business owners do not have the language skills or technical background to properly use E-Verify. Finally, the system itself is cost-prohibitive; it is estimated that e-verify will cost small businesses \$190 million per year to maintain.

These shortcomings are a significant barrier to fully engaging the growing Asian American community in the dialogue and advocacy related to the pending immigration reform debate. As strong advocates for comprehensive immigration reform, I request that you meaningfully address these concerns going forward so that the final legislation addresses the needs of all Americans, both current and aspiring.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grace Meng', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Grace Meng

Member of Congress

The following organizations have endorsed this letter:

Adhikaar

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Asian American Bar Association of New York

Asian Americans for Equality

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) NY Chapter

Chinese-American Planning Council

Chinese Progressive Association

Coalition for Asian American Children & Families

Greater Chinatown Community Association

Kalusugan Coalition

Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York

Korean American Family Service Center

Korean Americans for Political Advancement

MinKwon Center for Community Action

OCA-NY

South Asian Council for Social Services

YWCA of Queens