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Statement of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

**U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee**

**Hearing on “The Impact of Current Immigration Policies on
Service Members and Veterans, and their Families”**

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The Filipino World War II Veterans Parole (FWVP) program is a policy change that went into effect in June 2016 that has enabled elderly Filipino World War II veterans to have their family members join them in the United States to help provide much-needed care and support. The FWVP program was created by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in recognition of “the extraordinary contributions and sacrifices of Filipino veterans who fought for the United States during World War II.” In reuniting with their families, the veterans have the benefit of the love and care of their family members in their old age.

On August 2, 2019, USCIS announced that it would be terminating the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program. Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC opposes the termination of FWVP and has urged USCIS and the Trump administration to preserve this important program that has had a profound impact on the lives of our Filipino World War II veterans.

Organizational Background

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC (“Advancing Justice | AAJC”) is a national non-profit organization founded in 1991 dedicated to advancing civil and human rights for Asian Americans. Advancing Justice | AAJC is the leading national advocate for immigration policy on behalf of the Asian American community, and in this capacity, we work to reunite and keep immigrant families together. Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC advocated for the creation of the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program and organized with other advocacy organizations to push for its implementation. We appreciate this opportunity to submit a written statement and thank the subcommittee members for holding this hearing to examine the impact of immigration policies on service members, veterans, and their families.

The Filipino World War II Veterans Parole Program

The Filipino World War II Veterans Parole Program program allows Filipino WWII veterans to apply for parole for family members who have pending immigrant visa applications. In most cases, the veterans who hope to benefit from the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program submitted immigration petitions for their family members years ago. Many of the Filipino veterans were only able to become U.S. citizens as a result of legislation passed in 1990 after decades of community advocacy. Many of these veterans filed immigration petitions shortly after the veterans became eligible to sponsor family members to immigrate. Due to lengthy visa backlogs, however, their family members have been waiting for many years, even decades, for their visas to be approved.

The Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program has had a profound impact on the veterans and their families who have now been reunited. Upon approval for parole, the veteran's family members are able to travel to the United States. Once in the United States, they can apply for work authorization and complete the visa application process from here. Now that they are together, these families are able to care for one another and provide support on a daily basis, which has been of tremendous benefit for the elderly veterans.

In making the case for parole to be extended to the family members of Filipino World War II veterans, we argued that the advanced age of the remaining veterans coupled with the visa backlogs meant that many more veterans would pass away before their relatives would finally be granted their green cards. Furthermore, the elderly veterans have increasingly greater need to have family near to provide vital care and support. We felt – and many agreed – that it was clear that expediting the reunification of the veterans with their family members would yield “significant public benefit” and serve an “urgent humanitarian” purpose.

Letters have been submitted to USCIS by Members of Congress calling for a reversal of the decision to terminate the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program. The September 18, 2019 letter led by Senator Mazie Hirono was joined by Senators Richard Blumenthal, Jacky Rosen, Tammy Duckworth, Kamala Harris, Brian Schatz, Amy Klobuchar, Catherine Cortez Masto, Cory Booker, Tim Kaine, Elizabeth Warren, Sherrod Brown, Chris Coons, and Dianne Feinstein. The letter also dated September 18, 2019, led by Representative Ed Case was joined by Representatives Don Young; Jan Schakowsky; Derek Kilmer; Jackie Speier; Alan Lowenthal; Elaine Luria; Judy Chu; Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.; Adam Smith; James P. McGovern; Tulsi Gabbard; Grace F. Napolitano; TJ Cox; Ted W. Lieu; Juan Vargas; Eric Swalwell; André Carson; Susie Lee; and Raúl M. Grijalva.

In its announcement to terminate the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program, USCIS stated that it must exercise parole authority on a “case-by-case” basis and that categorical parole programs allowed individuals to “skip the line and bypass the proper channels established by Congress.” The decision of whether to approve parole under FWVP is still a discretionary matter for USCIS and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. In applying for parole, Filipino World War II veterans and their surviving spouses have to submit proof of their family relationship to the intended parole beneficiaries – and this is on top of the proof of familial relationship they had already submitted with their initial immigration petitions. They also must submit documentation of their veteran status. In addition, the veterans must provide proof that



they are able to provide financial support for the family members they are sponsoring to immigrate to the United States. As part of the approval process, the family members are also subject to screening. Family members have to go through an interview at the U.S. consulate and provide their identity documents, passport, documents demonstrating eligibility for FWVP, and medical examination results.

The approval of an application for parole is by no means automatic. As of June 30, 2019, over the three years since the FWVP program was implemented in June 2016, 648 applications have been submitted, and 301 have been approved. Approximately 40% of applications have been denied. As of June 30, 2019, 84 applications were still pending.

In its August announcement, USCIS expressed its commitment to exercising parole authority in a way that “does not encourage aliens to unlawfully enter the United States.” Under the FWVP program, parole is only available to those with pending immigration petitions. These are individuals who, in time, would have had their family immigration petitions approved and been admitted to the United States as lawful permanent residents. The FWVP program in no way creates incentive for unlawful entry. If anything, FWVP beneficiaries have come forward of their own accord and proactively solicited permission for expedited entry in accordance with the law.

Over the years, the United States has taken steps to recognize the Filipino World War II veterans and honor their service. Just two years ago, the Filipino World War II veterans were awarded one of our country’s highest honors, the Congressional Gold Medal. The award ceremony in the U.S. Capitol included many tributes to the valor and sacrifices made by Filipinos who answered the United States’ call to arms during World War II. The veterans had waited more than 70 years for this honor to be bestowed. With the parole program, we hoped that they would not have to wait for more years before they could be reunited with their families. Ending the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program extinguishes the hopes of these veterans that they will live to see their family members approved to immigrate to the United States.

There are estimated to be only a few thousand surviving Filipino World War II veterans in the United States. The youngest of these veterans are now in their 90s. They deserve to have the care and support of family members here in the United States. They have more than earned the right to be reunited with their families. The Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program was created to support those who defended the United States during the war. We urge the U.S. government to honor our veterans by preserving the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole program.

