

VISA 'DIVERSITY' GETS OK

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Body

WASHINGTON The House Judiciary Committee voted yesterday to keep an immigration "**diversity**" **visa** program that helps nationalities, including the Irish, who were largely shut out by regular entry requirements.

The number of such **visas**, however, would be cut from 55,000 to 27,000 a year.

The panel voted 18 to 8 in favor of an amendment by Rep. Charles Schumer (D-Brooklyn) to keep the **diversity** program shortly before it approved an immigration reform bill on a 23-to-10 vote.

The overall bill would reduce legal immigration from nearly 900,000 a year to less than 600,000, and tighten requirements for entry under the largest category, which promotes reuniting families. By reducing priority for adult children and siblings of U.S. citizens, the change could fall hardest on Asians.

The measure also seeks to crack down on illegal immigration by setting up a phone-in system for employers to verify the eligibility of job applicants to work.

The Senate plans to consider similar legislation.

The **diversity** program, originally sponsored by Schumer and in effect since last year, boosted immigration by nationalities who were largely shut out by the family reunification provisions because their closest relatives were not U.S. citizens.

Paul Finnegan, executive director of the Emerald Isle Immigration Center in Woodside, Queens, said Irish immigrants "tend to come here as single people, without family attachments.

"A few months ago, people were saying the **diversity visas**' chances of survival were nonexistent," added Finnegan, who now believes it has "a good chance of survival."

Schumer called the program "important to New York because a good number of the people who come in under this program come to New York and revitalize neighborhoods." Other countries on the **diversity** list are Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Turkey and Ukraine.

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