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Unlocking the Doors to Education

Bill Will Allow Students to “RISE” Above Legal Troubles

WASHINGTON, DC – Fifty members of the U.S. House introduced a bill Wednesday to reinstate financial aid eligibility to tens of thousands of students. The **Removing Impediments to Students’ Education (RISE) Act** will repeal an obscure provision of the Higher Education Act (HEA) that denies financial aid to students with drug convictions. Since 1998, more than 160,500 students have been affected.

In January, the congressionally-appointed Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance recommended that Congress remove the drug conviction question from the financial aid application, calling it “irrelevant” to aid eligibility.

“Congress should follow the recommendations of its own appointees and immediately scrap the HEA Drug Provision,” said Scarlett Swerdlow, executive director of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, at a press conference today in the U.S. Capitol. Six members of Congress spoke as well. “Higher education allows young people to rise above their past mistakes and become productive citizens. Blocking access to education undermines the effort to reduce drug abuse and crime.”

States have begun to take action while Congress lets the HEA Drug Provision remain on the books. Last week, Rhode Island state legislators introduced a bill that would replace students’ lost federal aid with state funds.

Two hundred organizations have called on Congress to repeal the financial aid ban, including the National Education Association, the Association for Addiction Professionals, the American Public Health Association, the Presbyterian Church, and the United Methodist Church.

Students for Sensible Drug Policy, an organization with more than 100 college and high school chapters nationwide, is committed to providing education on harms caused by the War on Drugs, working to involve youth in the political process, and promoting an open, honest, and rational discussion of alternative solutions to our nation's drug problems.

Interviews are available. For further information, contact Tom Angell at (202) 557-4979 or tom@ssdp.org. Visit www.DAREgeneration.com.

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