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Congress Scaling Back Recovery and Education Roadblock

Some Students Denied Financial Aid Could Regain Eligibility

But Tens of Thousands Are Still Left Behind This Recovery Month

WASHINGTON, DC – Today the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee scaled back the provision of the Higher Education Act that has denied federal financial aid to more than 175,000 students with drug convictions. The changes will allow some affected students with past convictions to receive aid, but students convicted while they are in college will still be stripped of their aid eligibility.

“After seven years of political rhetoric and empty promises, Congress is finally acting to help some students affected by this terrible policy,” said Scarlett Swerdlow, executive director of Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP). “But this partial reform is like slapping a band-aid on a gaping wound. Tens of thousands of students will still be yanked out of school every year unless the law is scrapped altogether. Students around the country are outraged and will fight this misguided policy as long as it remains on the books.”

In January, the congressionally-created Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance recommended that Congress completely remove the drug conviction question from the financial aid application, calling it “irrelevant” to aid eligibility and stated that the question’s mere appearance on the form deters eligible students from applying. Under the partial reform, applicants will still have to answer a confusing drug question, which will still deter eligible students from applying because of past convictions they mistakenly think make them ineligible.

More than 250 organizations have called for full repeal of the Drug Provision, including the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, the American Council on Education, the Association for Addiction Professionals, the National Education Association, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church. For a full list see www.raiseyourvoice.com/supporters.shtml.

September is the 16th Annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery month.

Students for Sensible Drug Policy, an organization with more than 115 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.

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