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CONTACT:

Tom Angell – (202) 557-4979 or tom@ssdp.org

Adina Rosenbaum – (202) 588-7720 or arosenbaum@citizen.org

Education Department Sued for Withholding Information

Student Group Seeks to Expose Impact of Drug Law

Government Says Info Could Lead to Drug Legalization and Profiteering

WASHINGTON, DC – One of the largest student organizations in the country sued the U.S. Department of Education today over a Freedom of Information Act dispute. The group, Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), wants to know how many people in each state have lost financial aid because of a law that blocks eligibility to students with drug convictions. Congress is expected this month to scale back the law, which has stripped aid from more than 175,000 students nationally since being enacted in 2000.

SSDP, represented by the consumer advocacy organization Public Citizen, filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The suit stems from a refusal by the government to waive a hefty fee to provide the data. The Department of Education erroneously claims that providing the information is not in the public interest, but instead could further the commercial interests of those who might profit from the legalization of drugs.

“The requested records reveal how the government operates when determining who does and does not get financial aid,” said Adina Rosenbaum, the Public Citizen attorney handling the case. “The public interest in disclosure of the records clearly outweighs SSDP’s nonexistent commercial interest in the information.”

Added Scarlett Swerdlow, executive director of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, “It’s no big surprise that the government is afraid to reveal the true impact of its punitive Drug War policies. If citizens and legislators knew how this misguided and ineffective policy impacts their communities, we would be much closer to erasing it from the law books. Blocking college access to thousands of would-be students only makes our nation’s drug problems worse.”

Although the Department of Education is willing to release the information, a records officer said that SSDP hasn’t provided enough evidence to demonstrate an entitlement to a waiver of the \$4,000 processing fee required to compile the data.

A copy of the suit is available at http://www.ssdp.org/SSDP_v_DOE.pdf

Students for Sensible Drug Policy, an organization with college and high school chapters, 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. Visit www.DAREgeneration.com. Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. Visit www.citizen.org.

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