

# HEA Drug Provision Grassroots Guide

## *SSDP College Chapters*

Prepared by SSDP National  
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### **Objective:**

This is a Grassroots Guide to Action to steer your efforts to repeal the Higher Education Act Drug Provision, the law that blocks federal financial aid to applicants with a past drug conviction. The actions range from simple to difficult, building off of one another. Please consider this as a reference and plausible strategy for your chapter, not a fast-and-true guide.

*Note: Our national campaign to repeal the HEA Drug Provision is priority #1. With your help, we will "Scrap Souder's Law!"*

Contact the outreach director if you have any questions relating to the strategy or resources found in this grassroots guide. You can download the documents mentioned throughout the guide off of our website: <http://www.DAREgeneration.com>.

### **Action Plan for College Chapters:**

- 1. Devote One Meeting to Educating Chapter Members About the HEA Drug Provision and SSDP's Campaign to Repeal It.**

SSDP leads the student movement to repeal the HEA Drug Provision. Knowledge about the Drug Provision is the foundation for effecting change.

### **Steps to a Successful Meeting:**

**Logistics:** Schedule a meeting and advertise. Make sure you have the proper equipment to show a PowerPoint Presentation. Then, download the "HEA Drug Provision PowerPoint Presentation". Familiarize yourself with the presentation, which explains SSDP's position on and strategy to repeal the law.

**Brainstorm:** Allow enough time to talk about the presentation and to decide the direction your chapter wants to take. Consider forming a committee to spearhead efforts.

**Materials:** Pass out copies of SSDP literature and materials on this issue, including the "Legislative Guide," "Media Guide," "Grassroots Guide," and "Position Paper."

## **2. Use the Media to Raise Awareness About the HEA Drug Provision**

Since both the public and policy-makers get information about public policy issues from the news, you should work with the press to get positive coverage of your chapter's efforts to repeal the HEA Drug Provision.

**Letters to the editor:** Writing letters to the editor, or LTEs, is easy, effective, and rewarding. LTEs should be short and to-the-point. Your chances of being published are greater if your letter is in response to a recently published article. Make sure you write LTEs in a timely fashion; news cycles happen quickly.

For more tips on writing LTEs, visit <http://www.mapinc.org/resource/tips.htm>

Also, download the "Media Guide."

**Advisories and Releases:** When your chapter hosts an event on the Drug Provision, you should send out a news advisory to alert reporters. News advisories clearly and concisely spell out the who, what, when, and where of your event so that reporters have the essential details to cover the event.

If there is a local or national news development relating to the Drug Provision, you should send out a press release outlining your chapter's position on the matter. Hopefully, future articles about the topic will include a quote from one of your members.

Download the "Sample Press Release" to use as a guide.

**Doing Interviews:** If you land an interview with a reporter, make sure to practice your talking points in advance. Remember that you don't have to directly answer a reporter's questions; you should always come back to your main message and sound bytes. With that said, remember to be courteous and truthful in your answers.

If your chapter gets any press coverage, be sure to share it with the National Office and the rest of the SSDP community.

For more in-depth information about using the media, please see the HEA "Media Guide" as well as "Working

with the Media”. Feel free to contact SSDP’s communications director for advice at any time.

### **3. Organize a Petition Drive.**

Tabling in the student union or on the green is an easy, effective way to advertise your chapter as well as your campaign to repeal the Drug Provision. You can use a petition to build the database of your chapter and to demonstrate to student government members, faculty government members, media, and legislators that students demand repeal of the Drug Provision.

#### **How to Table and Petition on Your Campus:**

**Logistics:** Select a date when SSDPers have the time to man the table. Purchase or reserve a table from your student activities center. Download necessary literature and materials, most importantly the petition:.

**Visualize:** Buy a banner from your local print shop or make your own banner with the SSDP Logo. Ask the National Office or check <http://www.DAREgeneration.com> for information about t-shirts, stickers, buttons, and flyers.

**Educate:** Make sure SSDPers at the table are knowledgeable about the Drug Provision. Pass out information on the Drug Provision and the John W. Perry Scholarship fund for victims of the Drug Provision.

**Build the Petition:** Ask people who pass by to sign the petition to support repeal of the Drug Provision. Ask if they want to know more about SSDP. You can use the petition to illustrate support for repeal of the Drug Provision to students, teachers, administrators, media, and legislators.

**Make Money:** You can also ask people to sign up for the Drug Reform Coordination Network’s *Drug War Chronicle*. Your chapter will earn \$1 for every valid email. Simply collect e-mail addresses and mail them to SSDP. Download the “DRCNet Sign-up Sheet” and attach copies to clipboards for tablers.

**Victim Search:** Victims of the Drug Provision are essential to our efforts to repeal the law. Both the press and politicians want to hear from victims. When you meet a victim, collect their contact information and share it with SSDP’s communications director.

**Organize:** Keep the petition and sign-up sheets in a safe place. Log interested students' contact information into your chapter database. Use the database to promote upcoming meetings and events.

#### **4. Persuade Student and Faculty Governments to Endorse Repeal.**

As of today, at least 110 student governments have passed resolutions calling for repeal of the Drug Provision. This is one of the most important steps to take to influence efforts to repeal the Drug Provision. Passing a resolution on campus sends a clear message to students, teachers, administrators, media, and legislators that the Drug Provision must be repealed.

##### **How to Lobby your Student Government and Faculty Government:**

**Find a Champion:** Find a friendly student or faculty government representative to help you pass the resolution. Contact the person to request a meeting, and email the representative the "Legislative Paper" on the Drug Provision as well as the text of the resolution.

**Know the Process:** Ask your champion what you need to do to pass the resolution. Likely, you will need to educate the representatives and present to the entire student or faculty government.

**Garner Media:** This is a great time to write an op-ed about why it is important for the student or faculty government to pass the resolution. Positive press will help you pass the resolution. Contact SSDP's communication director to strategize.

**Use your Resources:** Keep the National Office updated on your progress. The outreach director, communications director, and legislative director are here to help you with logistics, talking points, and legislative questions.

#### **5. Persuade University President to Endorse Repeal.**

The University of Rhode Island SSDP successfully persuaded the president of their university to endorse repeal of the Drug Provision. He then educated other faculty and teachers about the Drug Provision, lobbied legislators about the Drug Provision, and spoke at a SSDP press conference.

##### **How to Make Your President an Advocate for Repeal:**

**Set the Meeting:** Send a letter to the president of your university to request a meeting to talk about the Drug Provision. Explain the importance

of the Drug Provision. Demonstrate that the campus supports repeal. Enclose a recent media hit.

**The Relationship:** When you meet, ask the president to be a public advocate for repeal. An advocate can speak to the media, lobby members of Congress, and support SSDP's campaign efforts.

**Follow-up:** Send a brief thank-you note to summarize the meeting and answer any questions the president had.

## **6. Lobby Representatives and Senators for Repeal.**

Meeting with your legislator is one of the most powerful things you can do. Lawmakers are unlikely to advocate repeal unless they hear from concerned voters. Be sure to contact SSDP's legislative director for the latest campaign update.

### **Protocol:**

**Set the Meeting:** Use government websites to find out who your Representative and Senators are. Identify yourself as a constituent and ask to meet with the member or the relevant staffer. You will probably have to fax a formal request to the office. Be prepared to call several times. Persistence is key.

**Prepare:** Contact SSDP's legislative director to discuss an agenda for the meeting and points to talk about. Also, you will want to discuss literature and materials to take to the meeting.

**Stay on Message:** Stick to the topic. Don't get into drug legalization or other issues.

**Be Early:** Members and staffers have tight schedules. They can run late or even cancel last minute, but you can not.

**Show Respect:** Memorize these rules:

1. Always address and refer to members as "Senator \_\_\_" or "Congressman/Congresswoman \_\_\_\_\_"
2. Explain the issue in detail but do not imply they are ignorant about it. Preface facts with phrases like "As you know, "
3. Begin with a brief word of thanks for something they have done, like "Congresswoman \_\_\_, before we start I just wanted to thank you for your great work on saving the spotted owl."
4. Never bash a member or his/her political party.

- Be Political:** Connect your issue with issues constituents already care about and illustrate how your issue directly impacts a large portion of the member's constituency.
- Be Honest:** If you don't know the answer, just tell them. This is good for two reasons. 1: It makes you look credible. 2: It is a great reason to follow-up after the meeting.
- Just Say It:** Say what you want to say. Don't leave the meeting without asking the member to do something. You will know what to ask for after talking with the legislative director.
- Follow-up:** Get the staffer or member's business card. Agree to keep in touch on the issue. Send a brief thank-you note or email mentioning the date and subject of your meeting. Let the legislative director know the results.

**7. Pioneer a Program to Provide Aid to Victims of the Drug Provision.**

If you attend a private school, you can work to have your school replace financial aid to victims of the HEA Drug Provision. Swarthmore, Yale, Western Washington, and Hampshire College re-instate financial aid to victims of the Drug Provision.

To organize this action, contact SSDP's outreach director. She will connect you to activists who have successfully pioneered a program to keep victims of the Drug Provision in school.



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**Resources:**

## **Other Groups Working on This Issue:**

### **Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform (CHEAR), [www.raiseyourvoice.com](http://www.raiseyourvoice.com)**

The Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform (CHEAR),-- a wide array of education, civil rights, religious, drug policy reform and other organizations – works to reform the HEA Drug Provision.

### **The Drug Reform Coordination Network, [www.stophedrugwar.org](http://www.stophedrugwar.org)**

The Drug Reform Coordination Network's founding purpose is to stop the chaos and violence of the illegal drug trade, end the bondage of mass incarceration suffered by hundreds of thousands of nonviolent offenders, stem the spread of deadly epidemic disease, secure the right of patients to appropriate medical treatment, restore Constitutional protections and ensure just treatment under the law for all.

### **The American Civil Liberties Union, [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)**

The ACLU is our nation's guardian of liberty. We work daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States. Our job is to conserve America's original civic values - the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

## **Experts:**

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