



Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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Dear Chairman Kennedy and Ranking Member Enzi:

We, the undersigned, join our voices as organizations representing millions of Americans concerned with opportunities for education, recovery from addiction, faith, civil rights, and law, to call on Congress to remove a harmful roadblock to higher education. We refer to the Higher Education Act Aid Elimination Penalty (20 U.S.C. 1091 (r)), which has stripped college financial aid from nearly 200,000 aspiring students with drug convictions since taking effect in 2000. While the penalty is intended to reduce drug abuse, it actually fosters the opposite effect by blocking access to education to Americans committed to getting their lives back on track.

Please include language repealing this provision in the pending HEA Reauthorization bill being considered by the Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee. Doing so would reinstate aid to aspiring students by removing the confusing drug conviction question from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, as recommended by Congress's own Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. The committee called the question "irrelevant" to determining eligibility and stated that it "add[s] complexity to the form and can deter some students from applying for financial aid" -- even some who are actually eligible but assume the question implies they are not.

Education has enormous benefits – for individuals and for society. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, college graduates contribute more than twice as much to the federal income tax pool than those with only high school diplomas. Numerous studies have concluded that persons who obtain college degrees are far less likely to break the law and become costly drains on the criminal justice system or to rely on programs like food stamps or public housing¹. Denying aid to otherwise qualified applicants costs taxpayers more in the long run through lost tax revenue and increased spending on law enforcement and social programs.

Federal college aid programs require students to make satisfactory academic progress to maintain eligibility. Therefore, the penalty only punishes hardworking students who are doing well in their classes and who are likely to be good investments in our nation's economic future, regardless of their past mistakes. Also troubling is that the penalty affects only persons on the lower end of the economic spectrum who rely on financial aid. Finally, because of unresolved racial disparities in drug law enforcement, the penalty has a disproportionate impact on people of color.

Though a partial reform enacted last year limits the penalty's impact to a smaller number of people, tens of thousands of would-be students continue to suffer its ill effects, all of whom have already been punished for their offenses through the criminal justice system. Substance abuse professionals consider positive steps like education – continuing and completing it – to be a crucial opportunity for persons seeking to overcome or avoid substance abuse, but the penalty eliminates that option for thousands every year.

For these and other reasons, more than 300 organizations across the country have called for the full repeal of the aid elimination penalty². America's chance to reopen doors of opportunity to tens of thousands of bright and eager would-be students is now. We respectfully urge you to repeal this law in full through the HEA reauthorization currently before you.

Sincerely,

-- signatories on reverse --

¹ Education Pays: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society. The College Board, 2004.

² Please see attachment with the full list of organizations that have called for the penalty's repeal.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
- American Association of Community Colleges
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- American Association of University Women
- American Civil Liberties Union
- American College Health Association
- American Council on Education
- American Federation of Teachers
- American Friends Service Committee
- American Probation and Parole Association
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
- Association of Recovery Schools
- Brennan Center for Justice
- Building Better Lives for Our Communities and Kids (Building BLOCK)
- Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- College Board
- College Parents of America
- Correctional Education Association
- Council on Crime and Justice
- Drug Policy Alliance
- Drug Reform Coordination Network
- Faces & Voices of Recovery
- Families Against Mandatory Minimums
- Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
- International Community Corrections Association
- Johnson Institute
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- Legal Action Center
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
- NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
- National Alliance of Methadone Advocates
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
- National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- National Association of Graduate-Professional Students
- National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs
- National Black Police Association
- National Consortium of TASC Programs
- National Council of La Raza
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
- National Education Association
- National HIRE Network
- National Lawyers Guild
- National Lawyers Guild Drug Policy Committee
- National Network for Youth
- National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws

- National Organization for Women
- National Urban League
- National Women’s Health Network
- National Youth Rights Association
- November Coalition Foundation
- Parents Ending Prohibition
- People For the American Way
- Physicians and Lawyers for National Drug Policy
- Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
- Prison Legal News
- Prison Policy Initiative
- Prisons Foundation
- Progressive Jewish Alliance
- Safer Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation
- Students for Sensible Drug Policy
- The Sentencing Project
- Therapeutic Communities of America
- United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society
- United States Student Association
- Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii
- Drug Policy Forum of Kansas
- Efficacy (CT)
- Justice Matters (CA)
- King County Bar Association (WA)
- King County Medical Society (WA)
- Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (CA)
- LifeGuard (IL and IA)
- Loren Miller Bar Association (WA)
- Maine Alliance for Addiction Recovery
- Maine Association of Substance Abuse Programs
- Maine Association for Prevention Programs
- Maine Civil Liberties Union
- Maine Substance Abuse Foundation
- Municipal League of King County (WA)
- North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
- Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers
- Perspectives, Inc. (MN)
- Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (PA)
- ReconsiDer (NY)
- Rhode Island Patient Advocacy Coalition
- Safer Foundation (IL and IA)
- Seattle League of Women Voters (WA)
- Sensible Colorado
- Washington Academy of Family Physicians
- Washington Osteopathic Medical Association
- Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Washington Society of Addiction Medicine
- Washington State Bar Association
- Washington State Medical Association
- Washington State Pharmacy Association
- Washington State Psychiatric Association
- Washington State Psychological Association
- Washington State Public Health Association
- Youth Transformation Center (CO)

REGIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

- African American Family Services (MN)
- Alcoholism Council of New York
- Chicago Jobs Council (IL)
- Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (IL)
- Church Council of Greater Seattle (WA)
- Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
- Council on Addictions of New York State
- County Alcohol & Drug Program Administrators Association of California
- Delaware Chapter: National Alliance of Methadone Advocates

Organizations Calling for Repeal of Section 484(r) of the Higher Education Act (as of 4/18/07):

National Organizations

- American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
- American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
- American Association of Community Colleges
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- American Association of University Professors
- American Association of University Women
- American Bar Association
- American Civil Liberties Union
- American College Health Association
- American College of Nurse-Midwives
- American Council on Education
- American Federation of Teachers
- American Friends Service Committee
- American Humanist Association
- American Probation and Parole Association
- American Public Health Association
- American Student Association of Community Colleges
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
- Association of Recovery Schools
- BACCHUS Network
- Brennan Center for Justice
- Building Better Lives for Our Communities and Kids
- Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice
- Center for Women Policy Studies
- Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
- Church of the Brethren Witness
- Church Women United
- Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights
- Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- College Board
- College Parents of America
- ColorOfChange.org
- Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
- Common Sense Legislative Group
- Correctional Education Association
- Council for Opportunity in Education
- Drug Policy Alliance
- Drug Reform Coordination Network
- Educators for Sensible Drug Policy
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Faces & Voices of Recovery
- Families Against Mandatory Minimums
- Family and Corrections Network
- Family Watch
- Fellowship of Reconciliation
- Friends Committee on National Legislation
- God Bless the World
- Human Rights and the Drug War
- Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
- International Community Corrections Association
- Johnson Institute
- JoinTogether
- Justice Policy Institute
- Law Enforcement Against Prohibition
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- Legal Action Center
- Marijuana Policy Project
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- NAACP
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- NAACP Youth and College Division
- NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
- NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
- National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium
- National Alliance of Methadone Advocates
- National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
- National Association for Public Health Policy
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
- National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice
- National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- National Association of Graduate and Professional Students
- National Association of Graduate-Professional Students
- National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- National Black Police Association
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- National College Access Network
- National Consortium of TASC Programs
- National Council for Higher Education

- National Council of La Raza
- National Council of Negro Women
- National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
- National Education Association
- National HIRE Network
- National Inhalant Prevention Coalition
- National Lawyers Guild
- National Lawyers Guild Drug Policy Committee
- National Network for Youth
- National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
- National Organization for Women
- National Organization of Concerned Black Men, Inc.
- National Partnership for Women & Families
- National TASC
- National Urban League
- National Women's Health Network
- National Youth Advocacy Coalition
- National Youth Rights Association
- November Coalition
- NOW Foundation
- Open Society Policy Center
- Parents Ending Prohibition
- People For the American Way
- Physicians and Lawyers for National Drug Policy
- Police Officers for Drug Law Reform
- Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
- Prison Legal News
- Prison Policy Initiative
- Prisons Foundation
- Progressive Jewish Alliance
- Progressive National Baptist Convention
- Public Justice Center
- Rainbow-PUSH Coalition
- Safer Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation
- Students for Sensible Drug Policy
- Therapeutic Communities of America
- The Sentencing Project
- Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society
- United Negro College Fund
- United States Student Association
- Voices for America's Children
- Wider Opportunities for Women
- Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)
- Women's Law Project
- Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform

State/Local Organizations and Governments

Arkansas:

- Alliance for Reform of Drug Policy in Arkansas
- Drug Policy Education Group

Arizona:

- Amity's Circle Tree Ranch Drug Treatment Center
- Elfrida Youth Center
- Gatehouse Academy Youth Treatment Services
- La Paloma

California:

- All of Us or None
- Books Not Bars
- California Opiate Maintenance Providers
- Californians for Justice
- Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Santa Barbara
- County Alcohol & Drug Program Administrators Association of California
- Ella Baker Center
- Free at Last
- Justice Matters
- Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence of the San Fernando Valley
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Sacramento Region Affiliate
- San Francisco Board of Supervisors
- San Francisco Youth Commission

Colorado:

- Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
- Sensible Colorado
- Youth Transformation Center

Connecticut:

- Efficacy
- Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council

Delaware:

- 1212 Corporation
- 142nd General Assembly of Delaware (House Conc. Res. 78)
- ACLU of Delaware
- Addictions Coalition of Delaware
- AIDS Delaware
- American Association of University Women -- Delaware
- ARC of Delaware
- Brandywine Counseling
- Children and Families First -- Delaware
- Community Legal Aid Society
- Delaware Center for Justice
- Delaware Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers
- Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Delaware Coalition for Human Rights

- Delaware Commission for Women
- Delaware Human Relations Commission
- Independent Resources -- Delaware
- Jewish Federation -- Delaware
- Latin American Community Center
- League of Women Voters -- Delaware
- Mental Health Association of Delaware
- Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League
- NAACP of Delaware
- National Alliance of Methadone Advocates -- Delaware Chapter
- National Association of Social Workers -- Delaware
- Pacem in Terris
- Phillip Randolph Institute
- Stand for Children
- YWCA of NCC County

Hawaii:

- Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii

Illinois:

- Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
- Chicago Jobs Council
- Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers
- Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights
- Protestants for the Common Good
- Target Area DevCorp
- Urban League of Chicago

Illinois & Iowa:

- LifeGuard
- Safer Foundation

Kansas:

- Drug Policy Forum of Kansas
- El Centro
- Kansas Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- Kansas FAMM
- Kansas National Education Association
- League of Women Voters -- Kansas
- Ploostin-Kiabuttamie Tribe

Massachusetts:

- ACLU of Massachusetts
- Alliance for Recovery through Medicine of Massachusetts
- Drug Policy Forum of Massachusetts
- Massachusetts Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- Massachusetts State College Association
- University of Massachusetts Faculty Union

Maryland:

- Sensible Drug Policy Maryland

Maryland & VA:

- AdvoCare

Maine:

- Maine Alliance for Addiction Recovery

- Maine Association of Prevention Programs
- Maine Association of Substance Abuse Programs
- Maine Civil Liberties Union
- Maine Council on Higher Education
- Maine Education Association
- Maine Substance Abuse Foundation

Michigan:

- National Council on Alcoholism/Lansing Regional Area

Minnesota:

- African American Family Services
- Brooklyn Peacemaker Center
- Central Center for Family Resources
- Council on Crime and Justice
- Hope Community, Inc.
- Minneapolis Urban League
- Minnesota Association of Resources for Recovery and Chemical Health
- Minnesota Literacy Council
- Minnesota NAACP
- Minnesota State University Student Association
- National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence, Inc. -- Minnesota Affiliate
- Perspectives, Inc.
- St. Paul Youth Service Bureau

Missouri:

- Columbia Alliance for Patients and Education
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse - St. Louis Area
- University of Missouri Graduate Professional Council

North Carolina:

- Burke Council on Alcoholism & Chemical Dependency, Inc.
- North Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition

Nebraska:

- ACLU of Nebraska

New Jersey:

- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence -- New Jersey

New Mexico:

- Black Student Union -- Albuquerque Public Schools
- New Mexico Drug Policy Foundation

Nevada:

- ACLU of Nevada
- Big Brother Big Sister Nevada
- Nevada Hispanic Services, Inc.
- Nevada Progressive Democrats of America

- S.A.F.E. House (Stop Abuse in the Family Environment)

New York:

- Alcoholism Council of New York
- Council on Addictions of NYS (CANYS)
- Hour Children
- Interfaith Alliance of New York State
- New York Civil Liberties Union of Nassau County
- New York PIRG
- New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- ReconsiDer: Forum on Drug Policy
- South Asian Youth Action

Ohio:

- ACLU of Ohio
- Alcoholism Council of the Cincinnati Area, NCADD
- Citizen Advocates for Chemical Dependency Prevention & Treatment
- Cleveland African American Library Association
- Community Action Partnership (Dayton)
- Dayton Urban League
- Faces and Voices of Recovery of Ohio
- Focus on Health Care
- Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry
- McKinley Hall Alcohol and Drug Services (Springfield)
- Ohio Citizens' Advocacy Board
- Ohio Community Corrections Association
- Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers
- Ohio Federation of Teachers
- Ohio Patient Network
- Prison Reform Advocacy Center
- Professionals in Substance Abuse (Cincinnati)
- Public Children Services Association of Ohio
- Racial Fairness Project
- Task Force (Cleveland)
- Women's Reentry Network

Oregon:

- ACLU of Oregon
- Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.
- Convict Amend Coalition
- Morrison Child and Family Services
- Oregon Literacy, Inc.
- Oregon Student Association
- Oregon Students of Color Coalition
- Portland Peace and Justice Center
- Recovery Association Project
- Sisters in Action
- SOU Women's Resource Center
- Urban League of Portland
- Women's Resource Center of Central Oregon

Pennsylvania:

- ACLU of Pennsylvania
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos (Philadelphia)
- Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania

- Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
- Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia
- Today Inc.
- Youth Interlock Society

Rhode Island:

- Family Life Center
- International Institute
- Joslin Community Center
- Knowledge Exchange Center of Rhode Island
- Providence Metro Treatment Center
- Rhode Island Family Life Center
- Rhode Island Office of Higher Education
- Rhode Island Patient Advocacy Coalition
- Urban League of Rhode Island

Tennessee:

- Chattanooga Endeavors
- Citizens for Justice, Equality and Fairness
- Highlander Research and Education Center
- Knoxville Leadership Foundation
- Nashville Peace and Justice Centers
- YWCA Abused Women Services

Texas:

- Drug Policy Forum of Texas

Virginia:

- Substance Abuse and Addiction Recovery Alliance of Virginia

Washington:

- Church Council of Greater Seattle
- King County Bar Association
- King County Medical Society
- Loren Miller Bar Association
- Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington
- Municipal League of King County
- Recovery Association Project of Washington
- Seattle League of Women Voters
- Washington Academy of Family Physicians
- Washington Osteopathic Medical Association
- Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Washington Society of Addiction Medicine
- Washington State Association of Alcoholism and Addiction Programs
- Washington State Bar Association
- Washington State Medical Association
- Washington State Pharmacy Association
- Washington State Psychiatric Association
- Washington State Psychological Association
- Washington State Public Health Association

Student Government Associations

- Association of Big Ten Schools
- Oregon Student Association
- Student Association of the State University of New York
- United Council of University of Wisconsin Students
- American University (DC)

- Amherst College (MA)
- Appalachian State University (NC)
- Baltimore City Community College
- Bates College (ME)
- Bergen Community College (NJ)
- Brandeis College (MA)
- Brown University
- College of William and Mary
- Columbia College (Columbia University)
- Dalton College (GA)
- Dartmouth College (NH)
- De Anza College (CA)
- Douglas College (Rutgers University)
- Earlham College (IN)
- Florida A&M University
- Florida International University at University Park
- Florida International University at Biscayne Bay Campus
- Florida State University
- Georgetown University (DC)
- George Washington University (DC)
- Goshen College (IN)
- Gettysburg College (PA)
- Grand Valley State University (MI)
- Hampshire College (MA)
- Howard University (DC)
- Illinois State University at Normal
- Indiana University at Bloomington
- James Madison University (VA)
- Lewis and Clark College (OR)
- Linfield College (OR)
- Louisiana State University
- Loyola University (IL)
- Mercyhurst College (PA)
- Monroe Community College (NY)
- Mount Holyoke College (MA)
- New College of Florida
- North Carolina State University
- Northwestern University (IL)
- Ohio State University
- Ohio University
- Oregon Students of Color Coalition
- Pennsylvania State University
- Pitzer College (CA)
- Pomona College (CA)
- Portland Community College at Cascade (OR)
- Portland Community College at Rock Creek (OR)
- Portland State University (OR)
- Rice University (TX)
- Rochester Institute of Technology (NY)
- Saint Cloud State University (MN)
- Smith College (MA)
- South Carolina State University
- Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
- Southern Oregon University
- SUNY Albany
- SUNY Binghamton
- SUNY ESF
- Syracuse University
- Texas State University - San Marcos
- Union College (NY)
- University of Arkansas
- University of California at Berkeley
- University of California at San Diego
- University of California at Santa Barbara
- University of Colorado at Boulder
- University of Connecticut
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- University of Iowa
- University of Kansas
- University of Maine at Orono
- University of Maryland at College Park
- University of Michigan
- University of Minnesota at Twin Cities
- University of Missouri at Columbia
- University of Montana - Missoula
- University of Nevada at Las Vegas
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of North Carolina at Wilmington
- University of North Texas
- University of Pennsylvania
- University of Rhode Island
- University of Southern California
- University of Southern Maine
- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Texas at Dallas
- University of Toledo
- University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire
- University of Wisconsin at Madison
- University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee
- University of Wisconsin at Richland
- University of Wyoming
- University of Vermont
- Utica College (NY)
- Washington University (MO)
- Wesleyan University (CT)
- Western Connecticut State University
- Western Maryland College
- Western State College (CO)
- Western Washington University
- Yale University