



Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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Dear Members of Congress:

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 co-sponsor the soon-to-be-introduced *Removing Impediments to Students' Education (RISE) Act*, sponsored by Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA). The bill 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 co-sponsor the RISE Act.

Sincerely,

-- signatories on reverse --

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

² The Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform, <http://www.RaiseYourVoice.com/supporters.shtml>.

To become an original co-sponsor of the RISE Act, contact Joe Racalto in Rep. Barney Frank's office at joe.racalto@mail.house.gov or 5-5931.

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 Civil Liberties Union
- American College Health Association
- American Council on Education
- American Federation of Teachers
- American Friends Service Committee
- American Humanist Association
- American Probation and Parole 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 (Building BLOCK)
- Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
- Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights
- Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- College Board
- College Parents of America
- ColorOfChange.org
- Common Sense for Drug Policy
- Correctional Education Association
- Council for Opportunity in Education
- Drug Policy Alliance
- Drug Reform Coordination Network
- Educators for Sensible Drug Policy
- Faces & Voices of Recovery
- Families Against Mandatory Minimums
- Family and Corrections Network
- Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
- International Community Corrections Association
- Johnson Institute
- Justice Policy Institute
- 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 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 Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
- 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-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 College Access Network
 - 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 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
 - National Urban League
 - National Women's Health Network
 - National Youth Advocacy Coalition
 - 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
 - Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
 - United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society
 - United States Student Association
 - Voices for America's Children
 - Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual
 - Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform
- REGIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS**
- AdvoCare (MD and VA)
 - African American Family Services (MN)
 - Alcoholism Council of New York
 - Alcoholism Council of the Cincinnati Area, NCADD (OH)
 - Alliance for Reform of Drug Policy in Arkansas
 - Books Not Bars (CA)
 - Burke Council on Alcoholism & Chemical Dependency, Inc. (NC)
 - Californians for Justice
 - Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (IL)
 - Chicago Jobs Council (IL)
 - Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (IL)
 - Church Council of Greater Seattle (WA)
 - Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
 - Columbia Alliance for Patients and Education (MO)

- Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Santa Barbara (CA)
- County Alcohol & Drug Program Administrators Association of California
- Delaware Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers
- Delaware Chapter: National Alliance of Methadone Advocates
- Delaware Coalition for Human Rights
- Drug Policy Education Group (AR)
- Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii
- Drug Policy Forum of Kansas
- Drug Policy Forum of Texas
- Efficacy (CT)
- Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights (IL)
- 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)
- Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (OH)
- Maine Civil Liberties Union
- Massachusetts Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- Massachusetts State College Association
- Minneapolis Urban League (MN)
- Minnesota Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence, Inc.
- Municipal League of King County (WA)
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence - New Jersey
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence of the San Fernando Valley (CA)
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Sacramento Region Affiliate (CA)
- National Council on Alcoholism/Lansing Regional Area (MI)
- New York Civil Liberties Union of Nassau County
- North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
- Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers
- Ohio Patient Network
- Oregon Literacy, Inc.
- Perspectives, Inc. (MN)
- Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (PA)
- ReconsiDer (NY)
- Rhode Island Family Life Center
- Rhode Island Patient Advocacy Coalition
- Safer Foundation (IL and IA)
- Seattle League of Women Voters (WA)
- Sensible Colorado
- Sensible Drug Policy Maryland
- South Asian Youth Action (NY)
- Substance Abuse and Addiction Recovery Alliance of Virginia
- 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
- Youth Transformation Center (CO)