

## SSDP's Aid Elimination Penalty Week of Action: Mon. Oct 15 – Fri. Oct 19

### How To Take Action Guide

*Background: The U.S. House of Representatives will soon be revising the Higher Education Act and they have the opportunity to easily repeal the Aid Elimination Penalty. Your goal is simple: To get as many people as you can to fill out the postcards and then send them back to SSDP National.*

#### KEEP IN MIND:

- Once people fill out the postcards, you are collecting and mailing them back in a big package to SSDP National, to be hand delivered to Capitol Hill. Postcards will NOT be stamped and mailed individually. At the end of the week, there shouldn't be any postcards unaccounted for. Because we were only able to print up a limited number of postcards, it is essential that we don't let any of them go to waste!
- SSDP National will look up and fill out the "Dear \_\_\_\_\_," line on the postcards. So don't worry if the person doesn't know who their representative is. We will.
- The glossy postcards can be a bit difficult to write on with some types of pens. Use one postcard as a test and try a few different pens on it before deciding on the pens to bring to the table. Make sure that you have plenty of pens and a blank sheet of paper to scribble on if the pen dries out.

#### STEP ONE: GETTING SET UP

- Make sure that every volunteer reads this guide.
- Get a table set up in a high-traffic area. Book this in advance, and get chapter members to commit to staffing it when they don't have class.
- If you have time, make copies of the included phone scripts and cut into quarters.
- Try to get at least two people to staff the table at one time, preferably with one person out in front of the table approaching passersby and attracting them to the table, and with one person behind the table pitching people on filling out the postcards.
- Buy some candy, condoms, or other free things that you can give out as an incentive for filling out a postcard.
- Find places where there are lots of people already gathered in one place (a dining hall, the exit of a building when class ends, an on-campus music event, etc.) and bring the postcards there.
- Talk with your professors about making announcements in class and then pass around the postcards (but make sure people pass them back whether or not they fill them out!)
- Make announcements at the meetings of other student organizations.
- Find out if going door-to-door in the dorms is allowed. This is a great way to get postcards filled out.

#### STEP TWO: GETTING PEOPLE INTERESTED

- In order to get people to come over to the table, you need to be a bit aggressive. Don't just sit there... approach people! The following phrases are tried and true, and serve to open up a dialogue about the issue:
  - "Can you take a second to help us keep students from losing their financial aid?"
  - "What's worse? Smoking a joint or murdering someone?"
  - "What's worse? Smoking a joint or raping someone?"
  - "Do you think students with drug convictions should lose financial aid?"
  - "Hey, have you signed one of these postcards yet?"

#### STEP THREE: EXPLAIN THE ISSUE

Once you get someone to come over to the table, explain the issue to them in plain, simple terms. Here are a few talking points—try them out and see what works best:

- “The Aid Elimination Penalty automatically strips financial aid from students with any drug conviction, including misdemeanor marijuana possession. Since 1998, nearly 200,000 students have been denied aid because of it. “
- “Drug convictions are the only infractions for which students are denied financial aid. Murderers, rapists, burglars, and other criminals are all eligible to receive aid.”
- Putting up roadblocks on the path to education does nothing to solve our nation’s drug and crime problems; it only makes them worse. Forcing students convicted of drug charges to drop out of school makes them more likely to continue abusing drugs and engaging in criminal activity.
- The penalty disproportionately affects people of color. Because of racial profiling and the discriminatory enforcement of drug laws, the penalty keeps them out of school at a much higher rate than the general population.
- The penalty punishes individuals twice for the same infraction. Victims of this law have already been punished by the criminal justice system. Taking away their access to education after they’ve already paid their debt to society is excessive.
- It’s not just students who care about this issue. Over 300 education, health, and civil rights organizations have called for a repeal of the penalty, including the National Education Association, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and the NAACP.

#### STEP FOUR: PITCH THEM ON TAKING ACTION

- Once someone agrees that the Aid Elimination Penalty is unfair (which will be most people), it’s your job to convince them to take action. Some talking points:
  - The House is considering repealing the Aid Elimination penalty soon, and they need to hear from you if they are going to vote the right way.
  - Filling out a postcard is a **quick, easy and effective** way to voice your opinion about an important issue. It takes one minute, and we’ll even hand-deliver the cards for you so you don’t have to worry about mailing them.
  - Hundreds of thousands of students are waiting to get their financial aid back. Please fill out a postcard for them.
- **If someone clearly wants to argue about the issue, just “agree to disagree” and let them move on as quickly as possible.** If you waste time on naysayers, you’ll be missing valuable supporters who could be filling out postcards.
- A person can use their school or home address on the postcard. However, it’s more valuable for them to use their home address so that we target as many representatives as possible.
- Once a person has filled out a postcard, thank them for their time and hand them a phone script. Let them know that taking a minute to make a phone call while they continue walking to class, lunch, or the dorms will more than double their impact.

#### STEP FIVE: COLLECT AND RETURN

- On the Monday or Tuesday of the week following the Week of Action (Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> for most chapters) you should ship all completed postcards back to SSDP National.
- If you received your postcards in an envelope, use one of the enclosed return envelopes, **put packing tape on all sides so the package doesn’t break**, write your return address on the top left, and bring them to the post office.
- If you received your postcards in a box, you can **use the same box** to mail the postcards back to us if the return envelopes are too small. You’ll just need to cover your address and write in the SSDP National address, which is on the return envelopes.
- You’ll probably have to spend five or six dollars on shipping, so ask for small donations at your next meeting.
- If you have blank postcards left over after the Week of Action, **continue to get them filled out!** Once you get the rest completed, send them to us in the second return envelope.
- SSDP National will copy the names and e-mail addresses off the cards and send that back to you so you can follow up with people who took action.