



Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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Delaware Drug Treatment, Rehabilitation and Policy Reform Leaders Call for Repeal of Financial Aid Drug Penalty *Since 1998, more than 140,000 students have been denied federal aid*

WASHINGTON, DC – Data from the Department of Education reveal that more than 140,000 would-be college students have been found ineligible for federal loans and grants since a provision denying aid to drug offenders was added to the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1998. A drug conviction is the only offense that bars students from receiving aid.

Recently, Delaware treatment professionals have been joining the fight to repeal the law. “The drug provision is one of the most counterproductive laws I’ve seen. Education is vitally important for people trying to break the cycle of addiction and crime, yet the HEA drug provision denies or delays their education. To reduce addiction, we should be making it easier for people to get an education, not harder,” says **Wendell Howell, Executive Director of the Addictions Coalition of Delaware and National Chair of the National Coalition for Full Opportunity for Felons.**

This provision also disproportionately punishes lower- and middle-class students, as well as racial minorities, because they need financial aid to afford to go to college. The provision also has a discriminatory effect since African-Americans make up over half of all drug convictions, yet comprise only 13% of drug users.

“The HEA drug provision is closing the doors of education and swinging open the bars of prison for young Black men,” says **Alicia Clark, Interim President of the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League.** “The HEA drug provision must be repealed if we want less addiction, less crime, and better educated members of our communities.”

Thankfully, there is momentum in Congress to reform the drug provision. S. 1860, a bill to reauthorize the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), will likely revise the 1998 drug provision of the Higher Education Act (HEA) by making the law applicable only to people who were in school at the time they committed their drug offense. While this reform is welcome, a college education will still be denied to many students who want one, including students who have paid their debt to society through the criminal justice system and who are in a treatment program seeking to get clean.

Furthermore, H.R. 685, introduced by Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) would, “amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to repeal the provisions prohibiting persons convicted of drug offenses from receiving student financial assistance.” Since the bill was introduced in February 2003, 69 other Representatives have signed on as co-sponsors; this is the most co-sponsors ever on a bill to repeal the drug provision.

“H.R. 685 is very exciting. More and more Representatives see that existing law is counterproductive, and the only real solution is passage of H.R. 685,” says Scott Ehlers, Outreach Director of the Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform (CHEAR). “The Representatives supporting H.R. 685 are really supporting students across the nation. H.R. 685 means individuals with a drug conviction will be able to get what they need most — an education.”

In the meantime, the Drug Reform Coordination Network (DRCNet) is helping drug offenders stay in school. DRCNet, in partnership with Students for Sensible Drug Policy, has established the John W. Perry scholarship fund. John Perry was a New York City police officer who lost his life in the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center, who was also an outspoken civil libertarian and opponent of the War on Drugs. The Perry Fund awards scholarships of up to \$2,000 to students who have been denied financial aid due to drug convictions (www.raiseyourvoice.com/perryfund/).

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