



Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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HOLIDAY ACTION ALERT

***Give Your Member of Congress a Thanksgiving Memory!
Urge them to Repeal the HEA Drug Provision***

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Action Needed

With the upcoming holiday break, Congress is on recess and lawmakers will be returning to their home district for the remainder of the week. During this busy holiday, please take 5 minutes of your time to call your representative and senators at their district offices and urge them to restore federal financial aid to those students denied aid because of past drug convictions.

In all likelihood, Congress will conclude their discussions on the Higher Education Act (HEA) drug provision by year's end. The Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform (CHEAR) and the more than 250 organizations supporting full repeal of the law are making a strong push to encourage Congress to restore financial aid to as many students as possible this Congress. Now is the time to take action. We can still influence the conference committee, where negotiators will hammer out the differences in the proposed changes to the drug provision. CHEAR is asking that Congress combine the best of both chambers' proposed changes to the drug provision by eliminating the law's "reach-back" effect for all offenses and removing the drug question, or question 31, from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Please take 5 minutes of your time to either call your Congressperson or visit www.RaiseYourVoice.com/TakeAction to send a letter to your member.

Issue

The Higher Education Act (HEA) drug provision is a little-known federal law that denies financial aid to students with past drug convictions. Since this law was enacted in 2000, more than 175,000 would-be students have lost their financial aid because of past drug convictions, no matter how minor the offenses.

Both chambers of Congress have introduced different budget proposals that contain different changes to the drug provision. The House proposal would reinstate financial aid to students with past drug convictions, while denying financial aid to students convicted while enrolled in school. The Senate version would reinstate aid to students with past possession convictions and bar the Department of Education from asking applicants about possession convictions on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). We are asking Congress to further this progress and combine the best of both proposals by eliminating the retroactivity of the drug provision for all offenses and removing the drug question, or question 31, from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

What You Can Do

Call your members of Congress this week and ask them to scale back the drug provision as much as possible as part of budget reconciliation. Call any day this week and don't be afraid to leave a message. Encourage the whole family to call in. The sample phone script is below, but remember, please be polite and stay on message. Your member district phone number can be found at www.RaiseYourVoice.com/lookup.html.

After you make the call, please also take a moment to send a pre-written letter to your member of Congress by visiting www.RaiseYourVoice.com/TakeAction.

Sample Phone Script

When calling your members of Congress, you might find the following sample script helpful:

“Hi, my name is _____, and I’m calling from _____ (location or organization).

I’m calling to encourage (Senator or Representative) _____ to ensure that the Higher Education Act drug provision, which has denied financial aid to more than 175,000 students with prior drug convictions, is scaled back as much as possible as Congress passes the final budget bill. The House and Senate education budget proposals have made considerable progress in scaling back this provision and I would like to encourage (Senator or Representative) _____ to ensure that the final reauthorization bill would eliminate the retroactivity of the law for all offenses and remove the drug question from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) altogether.”

Notes

If, in the unlikely event that the staffer might ask, you can cite the “drug provision” as section 484(r) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, or Title 20, section 1091(r) of the U.S. Code.

For more information on HEA and how to become active, please see www.raiseyourvoice.com. For suggestions on talking points or strategy, please contact Chris Mulligan by email at cmulligan@raiseyourvoice.com, or by phone at (202) 232-7111.