



# Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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## *Rhode Island Bill Compensates for Federal Anti-Education Law*

**PROVIDENCE, RI** –Students who have been denied aid for the last five years by a little-known federal policy may soon be provided the funds they need to go to college. State legislators introduced a bill in the Rhode Island General Assembly yesterday to assist students who have been affected by the Drug Provision of the Higher Education Act (HEA).

If passed, the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Act of 2005 will fully compensate each student denied federal financial aid due to a prior drug conviction in the amount they would have otherwise received. The bill also includes a retroactivity clause, allowing students who have been denied aid since the Drug Provision took effect in 2000, to receive funds from the state.

The Drug Provision denies eligibility for financial aid to anyone convicted of a drug offense, no matter how minor. Since the law took effect in 2000, Department of Education data reveal that more than 160,500 students have been denied federal financial aid. An untold number simply fail to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form because of the law. The provision disproportionately affects low-income and minority students who depend on financial aid to go to school.

“The Drug Provision wrongfully denies equal opportunity for education to young people who have made mistakes in the past,” said the bill’s leading sponsor Representative Joseph Almeida. “We should let these kids move on with their lives instead of holding their mistakes against them by denying financial aid.”

“Too many students have had the doors to education and opportunity closed to them because of the HEA Drug Provision,” said Chris Mulligan, Outreach Director for the Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform. “Congress should heed the advice of these concerned Rhode Island legislators, and repeal the law immediately.”

A resolution calling on Congress to repeal the Drug Provision passed through the Delaware General Assembly last year. A similar bill is set to come to a vote next week in Arizona. Rhode Island, however, is the first state to consider providing funds to students who have been affected by the law. The Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform expects the U.S. House of Representatives to introduce a bill to fully repeal the Drug Provision on March 9.

The Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform’s work is supported by 180 organizations from a variety of perspectives, who have called on Congress to repeal the HEA Drug Provision, including groups such as the National Education Association, the United States Student Association, the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, the NAACP, and the American Council on Education.

**Interviews are available. For further information, contact Brian Dolber at (202) 293-8340 or [bdolber@raiseyourvoice.com](mailto:bdolber@raiseyourvoice.com), or visit [www.raiseyourvoice.com](http://www.raiseyourvoice.com).**

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