



Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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Arizona Bill Urges Congress to Lift Student Aid Ban

PHOENIX, AZ – Arizona legislators introduced a bipartisan resolution in the Arizona General Assembly yesterday that will call on Congress to repeal the Higher Education Act (HEA) Drug Provision. The “concurrent memorial,” HCM 2004, was introduced by Representatives David Bradley (D-28), Cheryl Chase (D-23), Ted Downing (D-28), Pete Hershberger (R-26), Leah Landrum Taylor (D-16), Linda Lopez (D-29), Robert Meza (D-14), Michele Reagan (R-8), Amanda Aguirre (D-24), Manuel Alvarez (D-25), Olivia Cajero Bedford (D-27), Ann Kirkpatrick (D-2), and Senators Jorge Garcia (D-27) and Gabrielle Giffords (D-28).

The Drug Provision passed through the United States Congress as a rider amendment to the HEA’s reauthorization in 1998, effectively barring anyone convicted of a drug offense, no matter how minor, from receiving financial aid. 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.

Speaking about his motivations for introducing such legislation, Rep. David Bradley said, “I sponsored this legislation because of what I’ve learned in my professional experiences working the last 25 years in child welfare. The antidote to poverty, violence, and substance abuse problems is education.” Bradley believes “it is ludicrous to penalize a one-time drug offender by making it more difficult to escape the ravages of substance abuse and poverty by not facilitating their educational opportunities.” Bradley is also the executive director of La Paloma Family Services, which provides services to troubled adolescents challenging them to take effective control of their lives.

A similar resolution passed through the Delaware General Assembly last year calling on Congress to repeal the Drug Provision. Arizona Senator John McCain, an outspoken moderate Republican, is hoped to take the lead from the General Assembly by introducing a bill to repeal the Drug Provision in the Senate. A bill to repeal the law in the House of Representatives gained 70 co-sponsors from Congress, but lacked a companion bill in the Senate.

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 drug provision of the Higher Education Act, 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 heareform@raiseyourvoice.com, or visit www.raiseyourvoice.com.

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