



WASHINGTON BUREAU
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**STATEMENT OF HILARY O. SHELTON
DIRECTOR
NAACP WASHINGTON BUREAU
ON THE DENIAL OF FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID UNDER THE HIGHER
EDUCATION ACT
BASED ON PAST DRUG OFFENSES**

March 10, 2005

Thank you very much. My name is Hilary Shelton, and I am the Director of the NAACP's Washington Bureau, the federal legislative and national public policy division of our nation's oldest, largest and most widely recognized grassroots based civil rights organization.

The NAACP has consistently and vociferously been opposed to **any automatic delay or denial** of federal financial educational assistance to students or prospective students with past drug offenses on their record.

As such, we would like to thank Congressman Barney Frank and the other dedicated members of the US House of Representatives for working to correct this misguided and injurious provision in the Higher Education Act. The introduction of the "Removing Impediments to Student's Education", or RISE Act, is an important first step in our battle.

Since this policy was first signed into law in 1998, the NAACP has consistently expressed concerns about the practical impact it would have. And true to our predictions, the result of this policy has been that a disproportionately high percentage of the 160,000 students who have had their financial assistance denied or delayed have been racial or ethnic minority Americans.

How did we know this would happen? First, due to the continued economic segregation of our nation, more African Americans and Hispanic American students are dependent on financial assistance to attain their college diploma: in 2003, 74% of African American college students, 69% of Hispanic college students and 60% of white college students were dependent on financial aid.

And, despite the fact that national surveys indicate that the rate of drug use is nearly identical among Caucasian and ethnic minority youths, African American males under the age of 18 are *thirty* times more likely to be arrested for, convicted of, and confined in a state facility for a drug offense.

By basing an individual's access to higher education on a criminal justice system that continues, in the twenty first century, to operate in such a racially disparate

