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CONTACT: Alexa Eggleston, (202) 544-5478, x11, Paul Samuels, (212) 243-1313

**LEGAL ACTION CENTER LAUDS CHANGE IN THE LAW THAT WILL INCREASE
STUDENT FINANCIAL AID ELIGIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUALS
WITH PRIOR DRUG CONVICTIONS, INCLUDING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN
RECOVERY FROM DRUG ADDICTION**

Washington, D.C. – The Legal Action Center applauds passage of legislation that modifies the ban on student federal financial aid for people convicted of drug crimes to enable people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction and others with a past drug conviction to obtain an education. President Bush signed this legislation, S. 1932, into law (Public Law 109-171) on February 8th.

Under the new law, students who were convicted of drug crimes prior to their enrollment and application for federal financial aid will be eligible for aid and will no longer be subject to a ban that delays or denies federal financial assistance. As of July 1, 2006, the federal financial aid ban will only apply to students who are convicted of a drug offense while they are in school and receiving federal financial assistance.

Paul N. Samuels, President/Director of the Legal Action Center, hailed the new law as a “an important first step toward ending discrimination against people with a history of drug problems who are now living productive and law-abiding lives.” Mr. Samuels praised Congress for increasing access to higher education, stating that, “education is key for young people to enter the mainstream of society, obtain a job, and contribute to our economy.”

Alexa Eggleston, Director of National Policy, expressed the Center’s strong support for the new law

that “will restore federal financial assistance to tens of thousands of students across the country and enable them to enroll in higher education.” Ms. Eggleston also praised Congress for “removing one of the many barriers that individuals with criminal records experience when they try to reintegrate into society.” This new law, Ms. Eggleston emphasized, will “encourage individuals with past drug convictions to continue making positive changes in their lives and to contribute to their communities.”

The Legal Action Center is the only public interest law and policy organization in the United States whose sole mission is to fight discrimination against and protect the privacy of individuals in recovery from alcoholism or drug dependence, individuals living with HIV/AIDS, and individuals with criminal records. From its offices in New York City and Washington, D.C., the Center works to combat the stigma and prejudice that keep these individuals out of the mainstream of society. The Legal Action Center helps people reclaim their lives, maintain their dignity, and participate fully in society as productive, responsible citizens.