

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the Scrutiny of New Taxes
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

RE: Higher Education Legislation Amendment Student Services and Amenities Bill 2010

Dear Senator Cormann,

I write to voice my opposition to the imposition of the so-called "Student Services Fee" proposed under the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment Student Services and Amenities Bill 2010*. It is my firm belief that the proposed fee is a compulsory \$250 tax on students – providing little benefit, while harming those members of our community already struggling to make ends meet.

I attend the University of Sydney and, having grown up on the South Coast of New South Wales, was forced to move out of home in order to attend University. My parents are of limited means – one, a small business owner, and the other a military officer. Supportive though they have been of my determination to pursue higher education, they haven't been able to provide significant financial support.

With vacancy rates in Sydney between 1 and 2%, rental accommodation is extraordinarily difficult to come by, with rental rates astoundingly high. When this is combined with significant textbook and course fees, many students – myself included – have been forced to take on part-time jobs to simply cover the cost of living. I am disappointed to see that this Government would propose an additional \$250 burden on students, forcing us deeper into debt to fund our education.

Such a proposal is even more reprehensible when you consider the actual impact of the tax – that it will force already cash-strapped students to take on additional working hours simply to cover a compulsory fee for a service they will be unable to enjoy. In addition, the pressure of increased working hours to cover this tax will place an undue stress and burden on students, potentially harming their performance at University, as well as their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Contrary to the propaganda put forth by the National Union of Students and other organisations purporting to represent student interests, student services at University have not collapsed since the abolition of compulsory student unionism. Rather, the University of Sydney Union has flourished, offering services students want at an affordable and accessible price. In contrast, the Student Representative Council – the body to which this so-called 'amenities fee' would be paid – has delivered next to no services to students, choosing instead to donate upward of \$75,000 of students money to the National Union of Students. NUS, rather than advocating for students issues – housing

affordability, youth mental health and access to education for SES students – chose to spend over \$200,000 on the "Abbott's Heaven, Your Hell" campaign. A flagrantly partisan, utterly irrelevant campaign that represented an extraordinary waste of students' money. I shudder to think what waste and mismanagement would be observed were they to be given even more of other people's money.

In short, the proposed 'amenities fee' is regressive and unnecessary. Improving services for students doesn't require a new tax on students – but rather the appropriate management of the resources currently available to student organisations. The University of Sydney Union demonstrates what can be achieved when an organisation delivers services that students want.

I oppose the new student tax, and urge the committee to recommend that the Parliament retain the current laws.

Yours sincerely,

Morgan Forrest
University of Sydney