

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment & Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Secretary

Support for the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010

I wish to bring to your notice the inequity faced by young people required to live away from home to access higher education. The cost to families from rural and regional areas is approximately \$20,000 per year for rent and basic living expenses. This does not include the additional expenses related to tertiary education.

I have 3 children: a 22 year old attending Deakin University in Warrnambool. He works part time and lives at home so he can afford to go to university. He has two years to go. I also have a 20 year old, who attends university in Ballarat and who qualified for youth allowance by working for 14 months between leaving school and commencing university. He also has two years of his course to go. I have also been assisting him with some of his accommodation costs and car registration & insurance etc. He leads a humble existence, but he is attending the University of his choice, doing the course of his choice, thanks to Youth Allowance.

My concern now is for my 18 year old daughter, who has aspirations of studying Pharmacy or Pharmaceutical Science in Bendigo or Melbourne. Both cities are over 300km from Warrnambool. She has always excelled academically so these dreams have seemed attainable...up until now. With the Labor government changes to Youth Allowance, we now have to reassess whether my daughter will be able to realise her dreams. She will definitely be taking a gap year to earn and save money as we simply cannot afford the cost of accommodation & living expenses to keep our daughter at university for 4 years (along with supporting both of our sons). Even with the current criteria for receiving Youth Allowance, it would be impossible to work 30 hours a week once she starts university...and that's IF she can obtain a job immediately after relocating. With at least 18 contact hours a week, plus the same amount study time, 30 hours of employment is unrealistic.

Deakin University Warrnambool does not offer either of the courses I mentioned above, so she has no choice but to move away from home.

This disadvantage creates a barrier to the participation of young people from rural and regional areas who are four times less likely to go on to higher education than their metropolitan counterparts. If the current criterion for Youth Allowance remains, I fear the number will be much higher.

The changes to the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance place a further burden on families in rural and regional areas. For many young people it will mean the loss of any

opportunity to leave home and study the course of their choice at university. A vast number of rural and regional students return to country areas after graduating from University. With rural Australia crying out for more health professionals the Labor government has ensured the problem will only get worse!!

I am seeking a return of the previous Youth Allowance Criteria

Please address this issue of regional disadvantage so that all young people who have to live away from home to study the course of their choice are supported through the equivalence of the Independent Youth Allowance.