

From:
To: [Community Affairs, Committee \(SEN\)](#)
Subject: Re: SUBMISSION: Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021
Date: Friday, 26 February 2021 4:51:54 PM

To whom it may concern,
I would like to make a submission regarding the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021.

I am a 25 year old who is currently receiving Austudy: I have been working and paying tax since I was 13 years old, and working full time for the past five years. I'm now currently studying Engineering, which will mean that I'll be earning upwards of 100k a year for the next 30+ years of my life. By the most conservative estimate of income and taxation, I would expect to pay at least \$750,000 of income tax in my working career (25% tax, \$100k income, for 30 years), not to mention GST and the economic value of my contributions to infrastructure projects in Australia in my employment.

Currently, I live in a tiny cramped flat while I study and with the current Austudy payment (and fortnightly \$150 Coronavirus supplement), after I pay rent for the month I have about \$300 left for the entire months' worth of groceries, electricity bills, transport costs and living expenses.

How much a week do you spend on groceries? If I am as thrifty as possible and spend only \$50 a week on groceries, then that leaves only \$100 left for the months' worth of electricity, gas, internet, phone bill, public transport, petrol, and living expenses. Consider that the \$50 a week I currently spend on groceries equates to \$2.38 per meal.

So now that it will be dropping by \$100, I can consider rent and groceries paid (cooking every single \$2.38 meal at home, with no chance of supporting any local businesses) but all of my internet, gas, electricity bills will simply be unpayable.

I study Engineering 4 days, work part time 2 days, and have one "day off" which is simply a full day of study from sunrise to bedtime. I will actually need to cease my employment, as it is not realistic that I can study this very intensive degree and also allocate 2 days of my week to part-time employment which does not help with my study.

With all of the burgeoning Australian infrastructure projects, and with what should be a huge industry opening up in renewable energy in the next few years, I would expect that engineers will be in high demand and will be valued members of our society and industries, regardless of which party is in power.

But right now, the odds are absolutely stacked against me in succeeding in this field and becoming a skilled worker in Australia, as I am totally unsupported by our own systems. I am from a regional town, and have moved to a city where I can study this degree from a

reputable university - so I cannot simply live with my parents in a wealthy city suburb as most politicians surely did while they were studying.

Any money that I receive from Austudy is spent immediately in the following weeks. It must be, for my survival. Any increase to the Austudy payment will absolutely be spent immediately in the following weeks. It has to be spent for my survival. There is no magical place where this money vanishes. Any welfare payments made to low-income earners and university students is immediately spent back in our local economy. The rhetoric to the contrary is fundamentally classist, and vilifies low-income earners for the sake of votes from prejudiced high income earners: a petty game, played by a petty party.

I urge anyone reading this, to please consider raising the rate of Jobseeker and Newstart to a liveable rate where there is some dignity for the recipients. When I was fired from my job mid-2020 and needed to live on \$1050 a fortnight at the height of the Coronavirus supplement, I was able to fully focus on my study and was grateful for the support. If this is about petty politics and winning votes, then consider how grateful I was to feel like I could fully focus on my study, compared to how frustrated I am with the current situation. If the Coalition cared about Australian jobs and skilled workers being trained here, then they would not be paying me such a pittance, that I need to allocate my time to a medial job which costs my own education and study.

When I am in the workforce as a skilled engineer, I will certainly remember those politicians and parties who advocated for a raise to our welfare payments that actually reflects our cost-of-living and inflation, and I will remember those politicians who only considered me as a pawn in their game of promoting class prejudice instead of listening to the reasoned economic advice to raise our welfare above the poverty line. I truly hope that when I am paying \$25,000 a year in tax very soon, that the unemployed, disabled, and those studying will not be suffering as I am - and if they are, I will be wondering "where in Leppington are my tax dollars being spent?"

Whoever is in power needs to support the unemployed in these unprecedented times, and support those who want to study and contribute to the future of Australia, if they actually do care about their country and economy in any capacity. A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members.

Yours sincerely,