

4 August 2009

The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Submission - impact proposed changes Youth Allowance for Rural Student

The release of the 2009/10 budget saw proposed changes to the current Youth Allowance legislation to commence on January 2010. Our family is very concerned with the changes and whether our son is now able to attend Curtin University in Perth in 2010.

Our family lives in Busselton, South West rural region of WA. My son completed his schooling and Tertiary Entrance Examination in 2008. His career ambition to complete Bachelor of Engineering is not available anywhere in the south west region. To achieve his career goals he accepted an offer from Curtin University in Perth which will require him to move away from home and live independently, without family, in a city where he has never lived.

We have had to make a decision this year to defer commencement of studies for 12 months to 2010. Curtin University only offer a maximum of 12 months deferral throughout the 4 year course of study. The decision to defer was made because we are financially unable to support his studies, accommodation and extra living costs incurred with living away from home without student income support. The deferral decision was made to meet the workforce participation independence criteria for eligibility for the Youth Allowance in 2010. It is not an easy decision as parents because it may disadvantage and penalize our son in maintaining high education standards after 18 months off studying.

Our son has numerous casual employment arrangements to fulfill the workforce criterion that is currently in place which is to work for at least 15 hours a week. To assist his employment opportunities this year he has obtained a Licence to Perform High Risk Work (forklift ticket) and completed Certificate for Responsible Service of Alcohol. The workforce participation independence criteria has not

been an easy task as employment opportunities in our town have been severely impacted by job losses and lack of business growth in the current financial market. Our son has also experienced many employers who have not offered him a position solely, and openly stated, because they do not want a gap year student who will leave next year. Given this current employment climate, it is impossible for our son to get consistent minimum 30 hours per week work as proposed by the new legislation in our regional community.

Our son who is approaching 12 months through the current workforce criteria now has no chance of meeting the Youth Allowance in 2010 under the new legislation. He will also not be eligible to meet the Youth Allowance criteria that currently is in place due to the proposed date of change of legislation in January 2010, just 4 months short of completing. Without student income support he will also not be eligible for the proposed Student Start-up Scholarship or Relocation Scholarship as they both depend on eligibility for Youth Allowance.

This outcome leaves us in a difficult position and one which we could not have planned for. We are devastated and his plans are now in disarray. Our son is stressed that he will not be able to attend university as he planned. Is this fair?

At 18 our son is a responsible adult, he has voted, is accountable to the law, drives a car, has good work ethic, building good employment history and has an ambition to be a professional. We do not want to take away opportunities and disadvantage a good young man who will be this country's future.

I ask for your consideration to allow current gap year rural students to complete the existing workforce participation independence criteria for eligibility for Youth Allowance in 2010.

Thank you for your time and consideration.