

Attention Committee Secretary

I wish to make a submission regarding the Social Security Amendment (Income support for Students) Bill 2009.

I live in Busselton in rural Western Australia, approximately two and half hours drive from Perth and the university my daughter hopes to attend. I am concerned how the proposed changes will affect my daughters plans. She hopes to study medicine, which is only available in Perth. She has already passed the first stage of entry into medicine, by completing the UMAT test (Australia wide testing for medicine students), but her career choice is in jeopardy due to the proposed changes.

I would like to propose that rural/regional students who are unable to live at home to further their education are given concessions and flexibility within from the proposed policy. Gaining work for 30 hours per week is difficult in rural areas as much of the work is seasonal. Tourism and Wineries are common industries that children taking gap years in our area are employed in. These positions require people to work long hours at peak times, therefore, our rural youth should be allowed to average their income. Then, if they still require a 2 year gap, they will have to work exceptionally hard to gain their averaged hours over 18 months, then support themselves on their savings if they need to attend university before the 2 years is up. While still creating financial hardship, this would enable many of our rural youth to attend university, by only having to be fully self funded for 12 months. I cannot see where it takes into account whether parents still have children living at home, all other social security payments take the number of children you are supporting into account, why is this not the case. I have heard cases, where some parents are trying to decide which one of their children can attend university. How disappointing is it, that a Country like Australia these changes may mean that only the very wealthy or low income families will be financially able to send their children to university.

I have 3 children, the eldest is currently living in Perth and studying at TAFE and in receipt of Youth Allowance, having worked full time during her gap year. I have a Year 12 and a Year 9 student at home. Our income will exceed the limits and my daughter will be ineligible for Youth Allowance unless she works for a minimum of 18 months, working a minimum of 30 hours per week. This means, that if accepted into medicine, she will not be able to start her course of study for 2 years, as medicine only has intakes at the beginning of the year. Medicine is a 6 year course, therefore, my daughter will be 25 before she is able to work in her chosen field. Gaining acceptance into medicine is not solely based on TEE results, it is also based on interview and passing the UMAT test. This test is sat by prospective students in July each year. It costs \$160 to sit the test, plus an additional funds for practise materials. We decided that she would sit this years test, however, how will all the changes affect this. There are many unanswered questions that this policy has created. I believe that UWA will allow children to defer for 2 years, however, will medicine be one of these courses, what if my child does not get into medicine, but gets her second choice at a different University, will they allow a 2 year deferral. Our youth are criticised on many fronts, however, these children that have worked hard and planned their future are facing uncertainty and confusion due to a proposed policy that does seem to consider that higher education should be available **equally**, for **all** Australian children.

If my child was able to live at home and attend university, we would be able to manage and she would be able to gain a part-time job to assist. This is not an option as my daughter wishes to study medicine, in WA this is **only offered in Perth**, we live in Busselton, an approximate 2 ½ hour drive away.

In addition to this, with a rising unemployment rate, where are these children going to get jobs. Rural unemployment rates are usually higher, so, will our young adults who aspire to go to higher education **be taking the jobs of school leavers, thereby creating a new category of unemployed**. How many people in the future will be delaying retirement as they are still supporting their children through university and how many people will have to alter their superannuation plans and **as a result will be claiming the age pension instead of being self-funded retirees?**

These young adults will be able to vote at 18. If they chose to do so, they would be able to go to war for their country, however, they are not entitled to a higher education unless their parents are classed as being low income. It is common knowledge that Youth Allowance barely covers the essentials. Currently if you qualify for Youth Allowance, plus the full amount of rent assistance, you will receive approx \$444 **per fortnight**. According to research the poverty line for a single person (including housing) is \$391 **per week**. Many parents are already assisting their children through higher education, however, without Youth Allowance under its current format many future students will be denied a University education.

If you are a 2 income family, most will exceed the limits. Someone on \$20 per hour, working a 40 hour week earns over \$41,500 per annum. Most tradesmen earn \$40 to \$50 per hour. Income limits do not take into account how much people are paying off mortgages or business loans. We exceed the limits, however, we do not consider ourselves to be high income earners, we work hard, we pay our mortgage, we don't have overseas holidays, we are an average family who will struggle if this policy is adopted. According to statistics, it costs approximately \$20,000 per year to send a child to university, I assume this is if you live within commuting distance of a university, if you are rural based this would be far more. Therefore, would someone like to explain to me where I am supposed to find \$400/\$500 plus per week to assist my daughter pursue her dreams? If she was allowed to work during her gap year as per current policy and if current accommodation scholarships were still in place, we would cope. If this Youth Allowance policy is adopted without change, then the future aspirations of my children will need to be reviewed. We are disadvantaged by living in the country, we have fewer options within our school systems, less subject choices in Years 11 and 12 and we have the major expense of travel to Perth if our children wish to attend additional courses to assist them with their TEE. In my case, I have children who aspire to higher level sport and state representation, another case where country children are at distinct disadvantage.

If students live beyond a radius of say, 75km from a University that offers their course of choice, then they should still be eligible to receive the Youth Allowance on the same basis as now. The proposed provision of working for 18 months will require most country students to have a 2 year study gap. Returning to study after a 2 year break will be incredibly difficult, especially for students whose courses require high level maths and science. All our children deserve to receive an education to the highest level they aspire. They cannot be discriminated against by their ethnic backgrounds nor religion, however, these children are being discriminated against because they live in the country. The new policy will also favour people of lower incomes. Education should not be considered a luxury, and under the proposed policy, for people whose incomes exceed the limits, higher education will become a luxury for their children.

We need to make sure that all Australians have the same access to education, whether it be primary, high school, TAFE or university. No-one should be disadvantaged because they do not live in the city. Rural Australians will often return to rural Australia, these children need to be supported as they are tomorrow's professionals.

This generation will become the policy makers of the future and I sincerely hope that they have compassion and foresight, should they be the ones making these decisions in years to come.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission. I hope that you empathise with the plight of our children.

Regards
Di Riley