

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a 19 year old soldier currently near conclusion of a Gap Year with the Australian Defence Force. I live and work in what is classified as 'Inner Regional' Australia, a small town called Wollongbar in Northern NSW. In 2011, upon leaving the permanent force, I intend to undertake study in Brisbane, 200km away from my place of residence. I must relocate in order to study the program I have chosen. Due to my location alone, in spite of my work throughout the year, I will not be eligible for any form of support from the Government to assist me in my studies.

I personally consider the current system by which Youth Allowance eligibility is decided unfair. My parents are hard at work to pay off a mortgage, and are in no position to finance my studies and the costs associated with studying in a major city. However, the existing legislation requires me, being part of the 'Inner Regional' group, to defer my studies for at least another six months, within which I must find full-time work outside the Defence Force in a region that has one of the highest unemployment rates in Australia, with minimal qualifications and experience.

My gap-year peers and I commenced this year with the understanding that if we earned over a certain amount of money, showing independence and willingness to contribute, we would receive much-needed support to ease the financial pressures of full-time study. However, upon introduction of the new legislation mid-year, which claimed to make Youth Allowance "fairer", us 'Inner Regional' group were left, surprised, in limbo. What are we supposed to do now? Put aside our hopes of attaining a higher education yet another year, or 'dive into the deep end' knowing we must survive off the money we have managed to save?

Young people living in more remote areas have the chance to prove their independence (by earning a certain amount of money over a year) and then promptly commence study with support from the government. Young people living in cities have a broad range of established tertiary institutions to choose from, and the close-knit support of friends and family to aid them financially and logistically. My group, I feel, has been 'grouped in' with the more affluent city-dwellers and thus disadvantaged to a large extent.

This may be a blunt assumption, but I'm sure there are places where two young people could be neighbours on the dividing line and only the 'Outer Regional' person might receive much-needed income support. My point is that the current classification system based on geography has flaws which I believe cannot be dismissed or tolerated.

The current Income Support legislation has changed my perception of the current Government as a morally conscious Government, instead leading me to question the diligence of methods by which this country's legislation is devised.

I hope that everything in the Senate's power is done to ensure the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 is fully considered so that Inner Regional young people are given a fair go at working towards much-needed support, lest tertiary education become unattainable for many.

Regards,

PTE Riordan G. Wagner