

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

On 17 November 2010 the Senate referred the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 for inquiry and report.

The Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee is inquiring into the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010. This bill seeks to extend youth allowance payments to eligible students whose family home is located in "Inner Regional Australia".

I am writing this submission based on our personal circumstances and have personally approached our Federal Member, Mr Bruce Scott MP, about this issue.

Background

In June 2009 I visited our local Kingaroy Centrelink centre to enquire about assistance available for students who need to live away from home to attend university. The distance is approximately 200km where most students move to Brisbane for uni. I was shocked to find out that students who moved to Brisbane from 'inner' regional areas had to work 30 hours a week for a period of 18 months prior to attending uni to be eligible for Youth Allowance.

Our son had a Gap year in 2009 as an exchange student and fully funded this trip through working during high school. He had left our home and care on January 2nd 2009. He only returned home for a few weeks before moving to Brisbane to attend uni in January 2010. I was told that he was still my dependent by Centrelink. He was over 18 and we had not financially supported him since 2.1.09. I was advised that he would not be entitled to any assistance because

My income as a teacher was too high. We have one income as my husband is a primary producer.

He had not worked the required 30 hours per week for the 18 months prior

He had not worked a full time job before going to uni.

I was advised he was still considered my dependent and the ONLY way for him to be classed as independent and get some assistance was for him to 'father a child'. Then I was told he would get 'lots of assistance'.

2010 has been a financial strain as we had to fund his rent and living away from home expenses. Rent \$180 pw, Food \$50 pw, Internet \$ 10 pw, transport to uni \$15 pw to name just a few weekly expenses it takes to keep him in Brisbane. Through his own savings he paid for his own text books and stationary expenses, laptop maintenance and of course HECS fees. We have an older son who has left home but also two younger sons in high school, one of which is looking at uni in 2012.

The irony in our situation is that we actually had another child in July this year (not my son as advised!!) and I have been on maternity leave since April this year. He is still not eligible despite our lower income, as he hasn't been able to secure work in Brisbane for the required 30 hours per week and be able to attend a full time work load at uni. 15 hours per week is a far more realistic work load.

Recommendations

My request is that students who MUST live away from home due to distance, be given a living away from home allowance which would assist with rent expenses. ie. Youth Allowance or that ALL children in Qld be required to work a minimum of 15 hours per week to be eligible for Youth Allowance.

I feel it is grossly unfair that because we are living away from a major city our family finances are disadvantaged for our children to attend uni.

Students who live in Cairns or Townsville only have to work 15 hours a week, even though they have access to university education and do not have to move from home due to geographical disadvantage

The Gillard government has on numerous occasions publically upheld the importance of education to Australia's future. Regional students are not given the same opportunities as their city peers to access higher education

Too many regional students do NOT attend university due to the financial disadvantage for their parents. If you have a number of children it is a huge financial drain to have your child attend university.

Families who live in an area categorised as INNER REGIONAL AUSTRALIA should be entitled to the same benefits as outer regional, Rural and Remote. If they need to move from home due to distance, they need to have the same entitlements.

To work 30 hours a week usually means students need to take a 'Gap year' from their education. This is unfair as students in the city are able to attend university immediately after school. Students who move are forced to pay rent to be able to attend uni. Too many students intend to return to their educational studies after their gap year but sometimes this does occur and it is not in the best interests for some students to take a year 'off'. As a teacher I have seen this in many of my past students where they cannot get motivated to study again after a years break.

Conclusion

All students who need to move from their home to attend university due to geographical distance should have the same entitlements. Therefore every student should be eligible for Youth Allowance, irrelevant of the distance the live from Brisbane.

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