

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Social Security Amendment (income support for regional students) Bill 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing on behalf of all regional and rural students who have experienced discrimination from the Australian Government due to the changes in Youth Allowance. My name is Sarah Parker, and I graduated from Mackillop Senior College Port Macquarie in 2009 with a much higher than anticipated ATAR and will commence tertiary education in 2011 at UNSW studying Medicine. Having already been disadvantaged by receiving my education in a regional area, I am further being disadvantaged by not being able to receive the same funding and recognition as my "rural" peers. In my opinion there is little difference between Rural and Regional students. In order to study the same course at the same university we must both relocate find accommodation, which in my case is \$385 a week and bear the same financial burden. We DO NOT have the option to live at home while studying as our metropolitan counterparts do. However, rural students have the option to qualify for Youth Allowance under the old scheme and regional students do not. How is this fair? When we both share the same disadvantages.

Coming from a regional area, I am well aware of our disadvantaged health care system, which has been part of the reason why I have decided to dedicate the rest of my life to the Health Care profession. However, even though I have taken a year off and worked two jobs in order to work between 40 – 45 hrs a week I have still only saved enough money to pay for one year (out of the six) of accommodation. I am fortunate that I come from a supportive family who are willing to help out with a fraction of the cost, however when my younger sister (who graduates this year) moves to university my parents will feel the financial burden much more strongly and are even considering extreme measures such as selling the family home or even relocating. In my opinion, where we live in what we like to call a fair country this is not fair. And is only highlighting the educational discrimination of rural and regional students, something I'm sure you are all ashamed of. Yet there are many students whose family CAN NOT afford to send them to university, and many of these students could be aspiring Doctors, Nurses, Physiotherapists, Occupational therapists etc. who would all be willing to come back and work in rural and regional areas. Would not a bit more assistance from the government perhaps break this vicious cycle? Because lets face it, you have more luck getting regional and rural students to work in these areas than pay metropolitan students to relocate.

So in conclusion, I am certain that if regional students are regarded in the same way as rural students and able to take a gap year and qualify for Youth allowance, the government would be very close to ending the educational discrimination for those students who MUST relocate to study.

Kind Regards,

Sarah Parker