



# AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL Inc.

*The national federation of organisations representing parents of students attending non-government schools to achieve choice, quality, equity and voice*

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Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

## **Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee concerning the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010**

### **The Australian Parents Council**

The Australian Parents Council (referred to throughout this submission as APC) is the national federation of organisations representing the parents of students attending non-governments schools in Australia.

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

We are especially concerned to ensure that those school leavers within this classification are enabled to proceed as soon as possible with their education at tertiary level with the same eligibility criteria for access to the Independent Youth Allowance as those in outer regional, rural and remote areas.

### **Support for the Bill**

APC supports the extension of the previous Independent Youth Allowance assessment criteria to those students whose family homes are located in Inner Regional Australia, especially where the family home closely abuts areas that are classified as outer regional and wherein students are eligible for the allowance under the previous rules.

Reliance for location eligibility on the borders defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) discriminates against students whose situation regarding location and work availability is virtually the same as those in the category of outer regional Australia. We note the variation in the Inner Regional area from large regional cities and in one case the capital city of Hobart to small towns where employment possibilities may well be non-existent or at best dependent on seasonal and/or part time work only.

Inner Regional Australian students should have the opportunity to apply for the Independent Youth Allowance with their applications being treated on a case-by-case basis depending on the precise location of the family home and consequent access to regular employment and appropriate tertiary education facilities, along with compliance with other eligibility criteria.

### **Disincentive for students**

The current situation is a serious disincentive for inner regional school leavers where the necessity for the work criteria of 30 hours per week for 18 months would put off their entry into tertiary education for two years after leaving school. Those in outer regional, remote and very remote areas could fulfill the work requirement of \$20,000 in one year with the possibility of being eligible for study in their second year after leaving school. Inner regional school leavers should have the same opportunity.

### **Parents**

Parents of modest means who have made their home in an inner regional area face serious financial problems in assisting their children to proceed to tertiary education. They should receive the same treatment for their children as families in outer regional and remote areas.

### **Government Guarantees**

When the Australian Government entered into an agreement with the Independents Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor after the last federal election, they promised increased education resources for regional and remote schools and students. It would be most unfortunate if on leaving their schools the Independent Youth Allowance was unavailable to students in substantially the same position as students living in, in some cases marginally, more remote areas. The agreement with the Independents also promised that every student who qualifies would be guaranteed access to a university place.

### **Examining the ASGC**

It appears that the Government has agreed to examine whether the ASGC is the most appropriate mechanism in determining eligibility for Youth Allowance, but only within the constraints of the current budget.

It seems to the APC that the Government should be examining the areas classified as inner regional to ensure that young people whose homes are in some of these areas, which are as remote as in other classifications, are not discriminated against and condemned to terminating their studies at the end of secondary school.

APC further proposes that a much simpler and cost effective way of determining geographical eligibility may be to draw a more geographically realistic map and prescribe that students whose families reside in the designated areas are deemed eligible for Independent Youth Allowance for the purpose of furthering their studies.

### **Constitutionality of the Bill**

The Government has questioned the constitutionality of the Bill, saying that the Bill should not be allowed to proceed on the basis that it requires the appropriation of money and that such a bill cannot be introduced in the Senate.

While there may be different views regarding interpretation of certain sections of the Constitution, the Bill does not appropriate money. Any funds required to support the measures in the Bill have already been appropriated by the Parliament in the form of a special appropriation of an indefinite amount in section 242 of the Social Security Administration Act 1999. The Bill can be introduced in the Senate.

Although the Bill will have the effect of increasing the budget allocation, estimated to be an additional \$90 million a year for 4 years, it will extend the same opportunities for young people to access tertiary education at the earliest time according to the same criteria as their, in some cases marginally, more remote neighbours. It has been pointed out that the additional funds can be met from the Education Reserve Fund.

Education policies and goals in Australia all endorse continuing education as important for productivity and the well being of this country. Ensuring that the children of the less wealthy in some areas do not miss out on equal access to continuing education should not be considered a cost but as an investment in Australia's future.

APC would be happy to discuss this submission further.

Yours faithfully

**IAN DALTON**  
*Executive Director*