

To Whom It May Concern

The changes that the Labor Government has made in relation to Youth Allowance significantly effects regional students wishing to attend university.

My daughter completed year 12 in 2009 and did exceptionally well receiving an enter score of 96.25. She was accepted into Deakin University, Burwood, Melbourne to study law. She had always planned to take a gap year and work during the 12 months in order to save money and gain some life experience prior to going to University.

At the conclusion of exams in 2009 my daughter was lucky enough to find full time work with a legal firm in Wodonga. She finished exams on Thursday 16 November 2009 and commenced fulltime work on the following Monday.

When the decision to change youth allowance eligibility criteria was announced in early 2010 my daughter was devastated not to mention the rest of our family. She is now in a situation where she needs to find employment for 30 hours per for 13 weeks come February 2011 so as she can meet the new criteria and pursue her dream of studying law. If we lived approximately 80Kms down the road my daughter would have met the eligibility criteria as we would have been in a different post code that isn't affected by the new changes. I feel we are being discriminated against due to where we live, that being regional Victoria.

Finding fulltime work for 18 months in regional areas is extremely hard and very competitive. Employers I believe are reluctant to hire young people for a short period of time because they know they are going to leave. They would prefer to hire somebody who is going to commit to them long term.

My daughter would ideally have preferred to stay at home to study law at one of the local universities either CSU or La Trobe. Both these local universities do not offer law so she has no choice but to move to a city and attend a university that offers law. I believe that if a student applies for a course that isn't offered locally they should not be further disadvantaged by having to meet the existing criteria of working 30 hours per week for 18 months.

Further to our own personal situation I find it extremely frustrating and unfair that my daughter is not considered a dependent of my husband who is my daughters step father. When it comes to income earned and the number of dependents in the family unit (formula used to calculate child maintenance) for him to pay maintenance for his two daughters from a previous relationship my daughter is not recognised as a dependent. This increases the amount that he is required to pay even though she lives with us fulltime. However when we have looked into our earnings for Youth Allowance my husband wage is considered and puts us over the income threshold for my daughter to be able to apply for Youth Allowance. The average income earner and family get hit hard no matter which way they turn to support their children.

I hope the senate enquiry into the recent changes for regional students like my daughter takes the time to fully explore how disadvantaged our children (young adults) are as a result of the new criteria. Remove the regional boundaries and make it equitable for all country students to be able to attend university. The longer a student defers their offer it is less likely they will actually attend university. The 18 month timeframe of working a min of 30 hours is unfair, unrealistic and most cases unachievable.