



6 December 2010

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

I write in relation to the Inquiry into the *Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010*.

Since the Labor Government changes to Independent Youth Allowance came into affect July 2010, hundreds of students and their families in my electorate of Forrest have been seriously impacted – particularly by the ‘Inner Regional’ Classification for the majority of my electorate of Forrest in the South West of Western Australia. These changes are compromising students’ higher education opportunities and placing extreme pressure on families and individuals throughout the South West region.

Students and parents approach and/or contact me constantly on this issue. Some families are saying they will be forced to physically move to an area classified as ‘Outer Regional, Remote or Very Remote’ or to the Perth metropolitan area; some have to choose ‘which one’ of their children they will be able to afford to send to tertiary education or training; some are re-assessing the university degrees to find the ‘cheapest’ option and some parents are having to find a second job so they can afford their child’s education. These are just a snapshot of the circumstances people discuss with me.

The restriction of the Workforce Participation Criteria to only one criteria: ‘that a student must work a minimum of an average of 30 hours per week for 18 months out of two years’, is severely undermining the education prospects and opportunities for students living in Inner Regional areas. The arbitrary lines on a map which determine ‘Inner Regional’ certainly don’t reflect regional locations or the actual distances from tertiary options. The majority of students in my electorate live in excess of two and a half hours from their tertiary institution – they cannot commute.

‘Inner Regional’ students in small communities where employment opportunities are limited are often unable to find the requisite 30 hours of employment per week. Seasonal sectors such as agriculture and tourism are major industries in the Forrest electorate that employ young people during peak seasons, but certainly not for the required eighteen months. Students find it extremely difficult to gain full time employment for the non-peak periods.

The *Social Security Amendment (income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010* will allow ‘Inner Regional’ students, whose parents earn \$150,000 or less, to access previously available pathways to achieve Independence;

- (a) To have worked part-time (at least 15 hours a week) for at least 2 years since leaving school, OR
- (b) To have been out of school for at least 18 months and have earned at least 75% of the maximum rate of pay under Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale in an 18-month period (around \$19,500).



Over the years, many South West students have accessed Independent Youth Allowance using criteria (b) because it allowed students to earn the specific monetary amount over a single gap year to qualify for Independence.

Now, with the restricted Independence criteria, South West students are being forced to go straight from Year 12 to tertiary studies, placing extreme, additional financial, emotional and physical pressure on students and their families. The *Social Security and Other Legislation (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009* literally discriminates against students labelled as “Inner Regional” in my electorate and across Australia.

The other option currently available for South West ‘Inner Regional’ students is being forced to take eighteen months to two gap years to qualify for Independent Youth Allowance. The majority of available courses do not have mid year intake, therefore students must take two gap years.

A student studying medicine, dentistry, engineering or veterinary courses will have an additional two years placed on their already extensive course times. As we know, the uptake rate after a one year deferral reduces significantly – a two year deferral will only add to the decline in uptake rates. We have identified that not all WA Universities will retain a student's place for more than 12 months.

Inner Regional students must be able to access the additional criteria available to ‘Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote’ students to be able to qualify for Independent Youth Allowance.

I urge the Committee’s serious consideration of this Bill and the submissions that have been provided. The impact the recent changes to Independent Youth Allowance have had and will continue to seriously disadvantage regional students and their families. Parts of the South West are in the three fastest growing regions in Australia and therefore they need more qualified, skilled young people to provide services. One of the best ways to achieve this is for local young people to return, after their studies, to their own communities.

Our students are the future of Australia and desperately WANT to obtain a higher education and contribute to the economy through their desired profession. I strongly encourage the Committee to allow these students the opportunity to do so by supporting this Bill.

Yours sincerely



Nola Marino MP
Federal Member for Forrest