

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 1600
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madame

My name is Briana Proud I am from Port Macquarie on NSW's Mid North Coast. I have just completed my third year of a Bachelor of Arts/Law at UNSW in Sydney, and am lucky enough to be receiving Youth Allowance on a dependant basis. Whilst I am extremely grateful for the economic assistance this has provided me, if the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 is rejected, my siblings, and thousands of other regional students, will not be as lucky as I am.

It is well recognised that regional, not just rural, students face significant disadvantages compared to their metropolitan counter parts. I have always known that I wanted to study law at University, and in order to do so, it was necessary for me to move from Port Macquarie. Regardless of whether I chose to study this course at a regional University, such as the University of New England or the University of Newcastle, or, as I chose, at UNSW, I was required to move at least three hours away from my family home.

The financial impact of having to leave home and move to a new location at the age of 18 or 19 is extreme. Without Youth Allowance, a social security system developed specifically for financially assisting students, this would be impossible for many students. The flow-on effect of this is that an increasing number of students will be unable to obtain tertiary education, a number the current government contrarily aims to increase.

Port Macquarie, for example, is classified as "Inner Regional Australia". Hence, the several hundred students who complete their schooling each year in this area intending to go to University, under the Government's changes to Youth Allowance, will face significant barriers in doing so. More likely than not, the huge financial burden of University study will fall on the families of these prospective students. Using my five-child family as an example, this will mean that my parents will be forced to financially support my three younger siblings through University study, a cost that they will be unlikely to cater for without placing themselves in extreme financial disadvantage, if at all. Importantly, this is regardless of whether or not my siblings decide to study at a regional University – the fact remains that relocation is inevitable. On the contrary, if my siblings lived and went to school a mere 30 kilometres from Port Macquarie, at an 'Outer Regional' area, they would have been able to simply complete a gap year under the previous Youth Allowance admissibility requirements.

The example my family provides is synonymous with thousands of other families living in 'Inner Regional' areas of Australia. Without wanting to make any sweeping generalisations, in many cases, such families will be already surviving on a medium to low income, narrowly falling short of Centrelink's Parental Income requirements for

dependant Youth Allowance. This means that there is a very real possibility that thousands of promising students may be prevented by lack of financial means, not academic ability, from obtaining a tertiary education.

If, however, 'Inner Regional' students do somehow find the financial means to move from their home to study at a University, without the financial security provided by Youth Allowance, many will be forced to obtain part- and possibly full-time employment in order to meet the financial demands attached to independent living and study. As nearly any University student will attest to, the academic demands of most University courses provide significant restrictions on the availability of students to partake in the level of employment required to pay rent, buy food and pay bills. Aside from living costs, text books, travel to and from University and other general costs of attending University; place a further financial strain on University students.

As my experience at University has taught me, there is academic disparity between students who are required to spend a significant amount of time in paid employment, compared to students who, for example, still live at home, or who have no financial need to participate in the work force. The former category almost always contains regional students. It is my plea that the government will recognise how much harder it is for regional students to obtain a tertiary education, and instead of making it even harder, enact the Bill and provide some assistance to these students.

I am not here arguing that the Federal government should give students undertaking tertiary studies a 'free ride'. I am merely asserting that 'Inner Regional' students should have the same access to financial assistance that 'Outer Regional' and more importantly, metropolitan students have. To make this distinction seems grossly unfair and discourages 'Inner Regional' students who have significant academic promise but limited financial assistance from attending the tertiary institution of their choice.

As Senator Fiona Nash outlined in the Second Reading Speech, the financial impact of the Bill will be approximately \$90 million per annum. When considering the Federal budget, I believe this is a relatively small price to pay to both encourage and allow regional students to obtain the same opportunities as their 'Outer Regional', and metropolitan peers.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Briana Proud