

To The Chairman,  
Senate Committee Inquiry  
Social Security Amendment - Bill 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE :- SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT (Income Support for Regional Students)Bill 2010**

My Fiancé (Lyn Hoelzl) & I submit the following information & opinions regarding the Inquiry into the amendment of the Social Security Act which currently excludes some Regional based students. Lyn & I reside in Tamworth, I am a self-employed builder & Lyn works in the Public School system in the area of administration.

It was with confusion & disappointment that we learnt last year that the Youth Allowance benefits had been amended to exclude what has been termed as "Inner Regional areas". As you know Tamworth has been listed as one of those areas.

As a blended family we currently have two children at University, one at Sydney's Macquarie University doing a 4 year course & the other at the University of Canberra, doing a 3 year course, both of whom live on campus to enable them to study in their chosen fields. Both these children currently receive Youth Allowance granted under the old scheme.

We have another child who is currently working through her gap year & is due to start at the University of NSW next year to undertake a 5 year degree. Laura has excelled throughout her schooling in Tamworth & will no doubt accomplish similar results at University.

In 2012 we will have another child who will also be eligible to attend University should he so wish. At that point, we will potentially have four children attending University.

As we understand the new criteria, people who live in Attunga, which is 10 minutes' drive from the Tamworth city limits, will be eligible for Youth Allowance, this hardly seems fair or understandable given its proximity to Tamworth.

It is true that Armidale University is approximately 1hour & 15 minutes away from Tamworth by car, some may say this is a reasonable alternative to a Metropolitan University, however this University does not cover all courses & a regional student should have the same access to facilities & opportunities as a metropolitan student. We would not wish for a child of ours or anyone else's, to be travelling frequently & at odd times, on the New England Highway simply so they could go to University. The additional costs in fuel & car maintenance, as well as the safety aspect, would soon make the cost to accommodate someone in Armidale look attractive.

Metropolitan based students have the possibility of living at home, thus easing the financial burden on the family, but they are no more worthy of a University based education than a regional student.

In a modern Australia, geographical location should not be a consideration in the course someone's future takes.

It is emotionally hard enough for most parents to see children move away to further themselves, but in addition, to also have the financial stress imposed on them by not having help from the Government in the form of Youth Allowance makes the situation even harder.

It is commonly recognized that most regional students who make the move to the metropolitan areas also find part-time work to supplement their incomes & this is done out of necessity, while juggling study, budget considerations & sometimes being alone in new surroundings.

Both Lyn & myself are the first to say that things should not be easy to come by & that they must be worked for to be appreciated, however the current system will make goals unachievable for some "inner regional families" & the prospect of some worthy & eligible young Australians not to further their education at University is very real.

While the youth allowance does not eliminate all financial burdens in helping educate our children, it does go some of the way to improve the situation.

As parents we make a commitment to our children to help ensure they have every opportunity they can, the removal of the youth allowance in "inner regional areas" definitely removes some of that opportunity for some people.

We respectfully suggest that while Australia Governments, past & present, as the lucky & prosperous country that it is, spends billions of dollars in aid internationally, some of it on education, that the question should be asked, is it possibly time for some of those benefits to be directed internally & ensure that all members of the community have the same & equal opportunities as others?.

The present criteria for Youth allowance does not allow for this & needs rectification.

We have elected not to load our submission with figures & submit a balance sheet of costs for your inspection, but rather underline to the Committee that many young Australians are in danger of not realizing their potential because of what has been recognized as a grossly unfair system.

As you know, our children are this country's future & it seems unfair that under the present criteria, that sections of that future are in jeopardy.

We thank you for your time in considering our submission & trust that common sense & fairness prevail.

Yours Sincerely

Per David Stevenson & Lyn Hoelzl