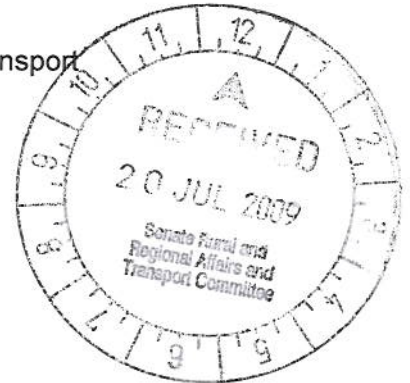


The Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
2600  
15<sup>th</sup> July 2009



To Whom It May Concern

I write regarding the proposed changes to Youth Allowance. As a rural resident in Victoria and parent of 3 children, our children are considered as isolated and so are eligible for the Isolated Children's' Allowance as administered by the Federal Government.

Our three children have necessarily had to move away from home in order to access appropriate secondary and tertiary education and the proposed changes to Youth Allowance once again highlight the discrimination that exists against the children and families who live in locations other than metropolitan areas or large regional centres.

The current Youth Allowance eligibility requirements have permitted 2 of our children to seek employment after exiting school and subsequently qualify for Youth allowance. To be eligible, they worked during an 18 month period and earned at least 75% of the current Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale. This meant that our children were then eligible for Youth Allowance (YA) in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year after leaving school. This enabled students to defer for only one year rather than 2 years. Our personal experience has demonstrated that the current YA criteria have worked well and paved a smooth transition to tertiary study and residence in Melbourne. The removal of the income criteria will clearly disadvantage rural youth and their ability to access further education.

The proposed changes will, in particular, discriminate against those families who live in rural and isolated areas. The expectation that our 3<sup>rd</sup> child and other young rural people in the same situation seeking a tertiary education, should gain employment for a mandatory 18 month period period, working 30 hours per week, is an unrealistic expectation in any rural community where unemployment is already high and increasing. This situation is also exacerbated by isolation and where public transport does not exist for isolated rural students to access employment.

This expectation not only puts young rural people 2 years behind their metropolitan peers but also increases the risk of an unsuccessful return to study. The cost of relocating children for education is an unavoidable and inevitable cost for rural families. However, the proposed \$6254 payment will not come close to covering the associated costs of leaving home and moving to Melbourne and the ongoing costs associated with living independently.

I wish to challenge the proposed changes by the current Federal Government as discriminatory, inequitable and unfair. These proposed changes will only further disenfranchise independent young people living in rural Australia who wish to pursue tertiary education and I implore you to reconsider the changes to the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance, so that young rural Australians and their families are able to enjoy the same conditions and access as their urban counterparts.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Prudence Smith". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Prue Smith