

The Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

I will be the first member of my family to ever attend university. It was always my plan to continue my education at uni but I knew to achieve this; I would have to take a gap year to fund the dream. While my parents are willing to help with expenses their money alone cannot pay for my college tuition, new textbooks and course fees, let alone all the other expenses that come with moving from home.

I was always going to work in a health science area. While it took some time to find out in what section of health science that would be, I settled on dentistry and oral health. With a very high demand for these particular workers in local communities like my own, East Gippsland, this profession allows me to return to the country to work, an important factor for me in my future plans. With few local institutions available at my disposal and none of which offering my chosen course I applied for Oral Health at the University of Melbourne. Knowing full well I would have to leave home to complete this course prompted the decision to take a gap year and, under the instruction and security of the governments promise, to apply for the Youth Allowance after 18 months.

If the government decided to restrict eligibility for the youth allowance I will have great difficulty completing my course without this financial aid. I live on a dairy farm and my family will see a decrease in income due to the current financial climate and declining milk prices. Due to this asset however, owning the farm means I am not entitled to any assistance if the youth allowance criteria were to change, such as the talked about income testing on parents. I am currently working 4 jobs to achieve the \$19,500 and it is simply unfair for the government to change eligibility for this important financial assistance halfway through the class of 2008's gap year. I know personally that over 70% of my age group in my area is taking a gap year to fund their further education this year.

I felt secure in knowing if I met the criteria for the Youth Allowance I would be able to complete university without having to deal with excessive financial burdens during my course. My university course will cost me \$15,000-\$25,000 for three years, college \$20,000 per a year and text book an estimated \$1,000. Please do not take this important lifeline many rural students depend on to further their education away.

Sincerely,

  
Ashlinn Mason

