

5th August 2009

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



Re: Changes to Youth Allowance

I would like to lodge a formal submission to your Committee requesting the Senate investigate and review the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance criteria. This is of specific concern to all rural students and 2008 VCE students currently undertaking a gap year. If you can help my daughter and thousands of students like her who have been severely disadvantaged and discriminated against by the recent changes to the Youth Allowance criteria I myself and many others would very much appreciate it.

Like thousands of other 2008 VCE students my daughter decided to defer her Uni course so that she could try and qualify for Youth Allowance next year by working and trying to earn \$19,500 (a big ask in its self) in the 18months from the end of school in 2008 to April of their first Uni year (2010). For families other than the very rich this is essential particularly for rural students like my daughter who must leave home to attend Uni. There simply is no other option for the average rural family.

She initially worked 3 part time jobs but was not getting enough hours to go anywhere near qualifying so in a move which I applauded she packed up and headed to North Qld where jobs in hospitality are easier to get. Let's face it there aren't many avenues for school leavers in the way of work other than hospitality and retail especially in rural areas. She landed a job immediately and her plans looked like they may come to fruition.

Then the announcement- students must now work a minimum of 30 hours per week for 2 years to qualify for youth allowance with **WAIT FOR IT – NO phasing in period!!!!** This means that the thousands of students who have deferred like my daughter have had the rug pulled out from under them. Their places at University are only deferred for 1 year so they have now wasted a whole year trying to meet now obsolete criteria. How can the Rudd govt leave them in the lurch like this?

My heart is breaking for her and thousands like her whose future plans have been destroyed. Some how we will not let her lose her dream but I believe there are many families out there who simply will not be able to find the money to

support their kids. Julia Gillard's only answer to this is that the ceiling for parental income means testing has been raised to from \$32,000 to \$42,000 reducing for higher incomes but seriously!!!!!!! Who can afford to meet their everyday mortgage and bill commitments and send their kids to University on \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000. Get real Julia-either I am doing something terribly wrong or the Rudd govt. has totally lost touch with the average family!!!!

Don't forget I'm talking about 1 child in my family- what am I going to do if all 3 of my children are at University at the same time? According to research which Ms Gillard actually used, it costs an average of \$20,000 per annum to send 1 rural student to Uni-do I need to do the sums for you??????

Clearly the divide between the rich and the rest of us continues to grow as does the inequities between rural and city dwellers with regard to educational opportunities.

These questions must be addressed

Why no phasing in period?

What is to happen to all the 2008 VCE students who deferred for 12 months?

How can families (especially rural ones) on an average income afford to send 1 child to Uni let alone 2,3,4??

What is to happen to the students who have deferred for 1 year? Will they all lose their positions now as they need to work for 2 years instead to qualify? How do the University's feel about this?

I sincerely hope the Senate will listen to its public and reconsider this extremely inequitable and discriminatory proposal. Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'e. b. healings'.