

To: **Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee**

Re: Proposed changes to the Youth Allowance

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you as a concerned country parent who just wants a fair and equitable education for my children with the same support system in place for them as there is for all who live in cities.

I live in the South East of South Australia with my husband and 2 of my children. We are 4 hours by car from Adelaide and 5 hours by car from Melbourne, however compared to many rural Australians we have relatively easy access to the metropolitan areas.

However, my children do need to leave home and move to the city to go to university – that is the reality for us. The cost of accommodation, food, transport and general living for 1 person from the country and studying at university could be conservatively estimated to be \$15,000 per year.

My husband and I do not have the resources to cover this as our second job (we also both work full time for another employer), which is grape production, has lost money for the last 4 years due to weather conditions and a down turn in the industry.

My daughter, who finished Year 12 at the end of 2008, has so far had 3 different jobs (waitressing, vine pruning and laboratory assistant) from the time she finished school to earn enough money to be eligible for the Youth Allowance and to be self supporting in 2010 so that she can go to University. In one of these jobs, during the grape harvesting period, she worked for 3 months, 6 days per week, 12 hours per day.

She was devastated when the news of proposed changes to the Youth Allowance were announced – she felt that her hard work was not being recognised, that she was being discriminated against because she was from the country and that she would have to seriously rethink attending university.

THIS DECISION COULD WELL CHANGE THE COURSE OF HER LIFE – AND NOT FOR THE BETTER.

I look at the ease at which my city friends' children live their lives (although I acknowledge that there are probably different pressures that they may be under) and feel that there is a gap that can never be closed....they can live at home, have parental support and spare time to study effectively and achieve their potential. My child will have to work constantly just to make ends meet. This situation appals me and I can do nothing to help....and I have already had my eldest child drop out from university in Adelaide through lack of money and support. He is now employed full time and has recently been promoted in his job but does not, and probably will never have, a tertiary education which is considered to be an absolute must for maximizing your employment potential these days.

Please reconsider the proposed changes in so far as they affect COUNTRY based students – it is just not fair.

Yours Sincerely,

Michelle Stehbens