

Our ref: 180104/AW

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
4 Harvest Terrace  
PERTH WA 6005

Dear Hon Matthew Swinbourn

**Petition No. 042 – Boarding Away from Home Allowance**

I write in support of an inquiry into the Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) by the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs.

The BAHA is an annual allowance paid to geographically isolated families to support families with boarding costs associated with sending their primary or secondary school aged children to an appropriate school.

The State Government's BAHA payment is paid in conjunction with the Federal Government's Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and/or the Second Home Allowance, which exists in recognition of the disadvantages faced by regional families in accessing appropriate education. There are geographical and special needs criteria that determines eligibility to these payments.

In Western Australia, there are approximately 1,866 regional students eligible for BAHA payments. In 2010, The Nationals in Government delivered a \$5.5 million boost to BAHA payments through *Royalties for Regions*. This boost translated into a \$785 per student increase to BAHA payments from \$1,305 to \$2,105, which was in recognition of the increasing cost of boarding fees and the inequalities that exist in accessing education in rural and remote areas.

In the 2017/18 Budget, the McGowan Government announced the *Royalties for Regions* component would be withdrawn, leaving just \$1,477 per student, which is a cut of \$628. The boarding fees for State Government residential and agricultural colleges have also risen from \$13,660 in 2017 to \$13,990 in 2018, and \$8,369 in

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2017 to \$8,536 in 2018 respectively. This means the gap between government subsidies and the cost of accessing regional education is increasing for regional families.

In the recently released Independent Review in Rural and Regional Education – Discussion Paper, Professor John Halsey pointed to the Australian Human Rights inquiry held in 2000, which found access along with affordability and quality were central foundations for regional students, families and communities. The AIC and BAHA exist in recognition of the challenges that regional families face in terms of accessing affordable and quality educational opportunities. By reducing the BAHA component, these important principles are being undermined.

It is well known that strong investment in regional education underscores the development of strong and vibrant regional communities. In December 2017, the McGowan Government announced a number of cuts to regional education. It is important to understand how the decision to cut BAHA is placed in context with the decisions to close Moora Residential College, cuts to frontline regional professionals and the closure of five regional camp schools. I suggest the lived impact of these decisions for regional students, families and communities is wide-ranging.

For these reasons, I strongly encourage the Committee to consider the appropriateness of this decision, what impact these cuts will have on regional families and regional development and how the cut to BAHA sits in the context of other regional education cuts (like the closure of Moora residential colleges, cuts to frontline regional professionals and the closure of camp schools).

Please note, these issues have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jacquie Boydell', is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Hon Jacquie Boydell MLC  
**Member for Mining and Pastoral Region**