

5th February 2018-02-05

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

Dear Mr Swinbourn,

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

On behalf of the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association, I request that your Committee conduct a review into the Boarding Away From Home Allowance (BAHA) in Western Australia and into boarding in general.

BAHA provides parents in remote locations whose children leave home to attend secondary schooling with funding to assist with boarding expenses. BAHA is only available to residents of Western Australia who have qualified for the Commonwealth Government Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Boarding Allowance. Thirty eight percent, or \$785 per student, of the \$2,105 has been funded by Royalties for Regions. Not since 2010 has there been an increase and that was \$50/student, also funded by Royalties for Regions. Our organisation has for some time, been lobbying for an increase to this, or at least a more equitable way of allowing families to recoup some of the expense of living remotely, whilst educating their children in a secondary setting.

The recent decision to reduce the BAHA is as follows:

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
\$2,105	\$1,948	\$1,791	\$1,643	\$1,477	\$1,320

*Figures provided to us by the Minister Sep 2017*

So, by 2022, the allowance will be well below the 2009 figure of \$2,055 (before there was any R4R contribution).

Over the previous five years, the BAHA Budget Estimate has ranged from \$4.165M to \$3.07M. The number of students who are eligible for BAHA have decreased therefore, a saving has been made in the BAHA budget of \$4.33M.

	Students	Budget Estimate	Actual	Savings
2012	2,056	\$4.165M	\$3.5M	\$1.165M
2013	1,474	\$4.165M	\$3.0M	\$1.165M
2014	1,233	\$3.752M	\$2.5M	\$1.2M
2015	1,346	\$3.601M	\$2.8M	\$0.8M
2016	1,556	\$3.070M	\$3.275 M	-\$0.205M
				<b>\$4.152M savings</b>

*Data sourced from the Department of Education Annual Reports, State Government Social Concessions Expenditure Appendix, Royalties for Regions Progress Reports and Legislative Council Questions on Notice 26 November 2013.*

Boarding fees per student at the Government Residential Colleges have increased 26% in six years. If eligible for the basic AIC and BAHA, parents now pay 247% more to send students away, than they did six years ago.

	<b>CHSHA (net cost)</b>	<b>AIC</b>	<b>BAHA</b>	<b>Parents (pay annually)</b>
2012	\$11,000	\$7398	\$2,105	\$1,497
2013	\$11,550	\$7487	\$2,105	\$1,958
2014	\$11,780	\$7,667	\$2,105	\$2,008
2015	\$12,660	\$7897	\$2,105	\$2,658
2016	\$13,510	\$8,015	\$2,105	\$3,390
2017	\$13,660	\$8,095	\$2,105	\$3,460
2018	\$13,900	\$8,249	\$1,948	\$3,703
	<b>26% increase</b>			<b>247% increase</b>

*Data sourced from Dept of Education WA websites and Federal Dept of Human Services website.*

While we are fortunate in Western Australia, that our Government provides residential colleges for regional students in some areas, there are vast areas of the state where there are no facilities, as is the case in the Pilbara and Gascoyne. The logistics for sending students to Geraldton Residential College are impractical, due to the lack of direct flights from Pilbara and Gascoyne towns to Geraldton. Families cannot risk the logistical issues if planes are delayed and children require overnight stop-overs in Perth. Often Perth is the only option and boarding at the City Beach Residential College is only an option for gifted and talented students. For many, there is no option other than independent boarding schools. The average cost of boarding at an independent school is about \$20,000 p/a and the average cost of tuition is a little over \$16,000.

*Data sourced from Boarding School websites.*

The recent decision to reduce the BAHA, while simultaneously increasing the boarding fee at the Government Residential Colleges, for many families will add to the financial difficulty and inconvenience of living regionally. It is difficult, with our limited resources to obtain figures on the number of families who will leave the regions, directly due to the reduction of this allowance, but certainly it will be a contributing factor.

- There has been a decline in the number of students eligible for the BAHA since 2012, which suggests that there are less students living in the regions.
- The fact that the majority of the Government Residential Colleges are currently not nearly full to capacity also supports a decline in the number of students living in the regions.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests student enrolments in the majority of government primary schools, located outside major regional cities and larger towns are declining.
- Independent and Catholic boarding schools are mostly unwilling to provide statistics on their occupancy rates, but there are vacancies in most schools, whereas in the past, this has not been so.

It is the case that families are leaving the bush for the purpose of secondary education and due to the added expenses of living in the regions. This in turn directly effects Primary school enrolments and in turn the economic viability of regional communities, which makes it more difficult to justify services. There is a downward population spiral in many regional areas of the state.

Western Australia is a large state and the Government must make provisions for equitable education opportunities for all students. The Recent Government cuts to regional education are wrong. Not only are

regional families feeling the cost of educating their children more than ever, they are also faced with regional education cuts to unique schools such as the six Camp Schools, which provide imperative learning experiences for students through WA, the taking of 20% of the funds from the Agricultural Education Farm Provisions Trust which will now go to the State and become unavailable for agricultural programs in WA schools and the closure of the Moora Residential College.

It is vital that families are supported to remain living in the regions, and essential to students that an increased Boarding Away From Home Allowance be made available to them, so that secondary education, without great expense to families, is attainable.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tash Johns', with a decorative flourish at the end.

Tash Johns  
State President.

## **Appendix Details to support our Letter**

Appendix 1: Case Study comments

Appendix 2: Resignation letter from Neville White, citing education as reason

Appendix 3: Food docket for 3 items (milk, bread and eggs) from Joondalup IGA totalling \$5.97, compared to price of similar items purchased in Varley in south-eastern Wheatbelt, which totals \$13.35, almost three times as much.

This illustrates how the cost of living for food is higher in regional areas.

People living regionally also have less choice about many other services including electricity, internet, rubbish collection and sewerage. If parents wish to participate in school activities with their children, they often have to travel large distances in order to do so.