

Submission
No 99

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Organisation:

Name: Ms Fiona Given

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Date Received: 03/03/2005

Subject:

Summary

From: webmaster@parliament.nsw.gov.au
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Date: Fri, Mar 4, 2005 4:10 pm
Subject: Submission to Post School Disability Programs lodged by Fiona Given

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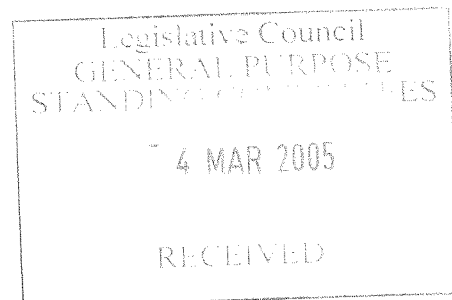
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Legislative Council
GENERAL PURPOSE
STANDING COMMITTEES

4 MAR 2005

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The Impact of the Changes to Post School Options and ATLAS Programs for Young Adults with Significant Physical Disabilities

I am going to use my own personal situation to illustrate how the changes to the Post School Options and ATLAS programs impact on young adults with significant physical disabilities. I am 27 years old and have severe cerebral palsy, which makes me dependent on a power wheelchair and a communication device. My disability also limits my hand function.

Impact on accessing university

I successfully completed my Higher School Certificate at my local girls high school and decided to pursue a career in law. I studied for six years at Macquarie University. During this time I spent a semester on exchange at the University of Calgary, Canada and completed an honours degree in Politics as well as completing my undergraduate law degree. I undertook exchange and honours in order to be more competitive in the job market. After completing my university studies, I went on to do postgraduate studies at the College of Law, to become an admitted solicitor.

During university and college I utilized my Post School Options funding to pay for transport, assistance with research, personal care, and massage therapy. The funding granted to universities by the Commonwealth to assist students with disabilities only provides services such as notetakers, readers, audiotapes of lectures and special examination provisions. It does not provide the services for which I used my Post School Options funding.

Therefore, without access to Post School Options/Atlas funding, it would be impossible for people with severe physical disabilities to access a university education and therefore their capacity to gain full time employment would be substantially impeded.

Impact on the ability to maintain open employment

Since December last year I have been working as a paralegal at the NSW Crown Solicitor's Office. I was successful in getting the job in the open market. I have proved to be a valued team member, making a positive contribution to the organization.

Although, I have had a successful start to a career in the law, my physical disability remains a significant barrier to my participation in the community. My living costs are significantly higher than my peers because of my disability. I spend \$200 per week in transport getting to and from work. Furthermore, I spend \$70 per week on massage therapy in order to keep me fit enough to continue working. I also sometimes need person care at work.

The extra costs currently funded by a Post School Options pilot scheme, which is

scheduled to cease in July.

If I chose not to work, I would possibly get a place in a day centre, which would cost DADHC the same amount of money as it would to continue to support me while I work. Furthermore, I would be on the Disability Support Pension and I would not be paying taxes. I would not enjoy the social benefits of working and feel the satisfaction of making a contribution to society. Society would not have the same exposure to people with disabilities.

I think if the government is serious about achieving a more inclusive society, they should support people like myself, and not limit support to people who are unable to work.