

Transport Administration Amendment (International Students Travel Concessions) Bill 2020.

Jenny Leong MP has introduced a bill in the NSW Parliament to end travel concession discrimination and allow international students access to the same discounted fares on public transport as are currently available to their domestic counterparts.

What will the bill do?

The object of this Bill is to allow full fee paying international tertiary students to be issued with the same concessional travel passes as other tertiary students.

“We believe that government travel concessions for full-time students should be extended to international undergraduates and to both domestic and international postgraduate full-time students”

Universities Australia CEO, Dr Glenn Withers

Background

There are around 190,000 international tertiary students in NSW - that's the highest proportion of the total international student population in Australia. Despite this, NSW is the only state that does not give international students travel concessions.

In 2018 alone, international education brought in \$13 billion to the NSW economy, and created almost 96,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

In a discussion paper developed by the Council for Australian Postgraduate Association in 2019, it was estimated that extending public transport concessions to higher education students in

NSW would only cost the state a maximum of \$169 million per year.

In 2012 a limited year long trial allowing some access to these concessions was undertaken.

“NSW universities have long argued for the re-introduction of transport concessions for international students on the grounds of equity and safety. Travel concessions also recognise their significant contribution to the NSW economy, and ensure the state remains an attractive travel and study destination.”

Professor Caroline McMillen, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle, October 2012.

Why is this important?

International students are under the same pressure when it comes to costs of living and access to affordable housing, as any other resident of NSW. On top of that, they pay university fees up to 3 times higher than domestic students and are also subject to strict visa requirements that only allow them to work up to 20 hours a week. Many international students live in poverty in NSW, with one in seven regularly skipping meals due to their financial situation.

A concession on daily travel could represent savings of hundreds of dollars a month for some students.

“The University of Sydney, in partnership with other NSW universities, has pressed its case for equal treatment for international and domestic students in relation to public transport concessions since 2004”

Professor Garton, University of Sydney Provost,
October 2012.

Racial Discrimination

In 2006, The NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal found that excluding international students from travel concessions was racial discrimination. But rather than complying with the decision, the then NSW ALP Government passed new legislation to make travel concessions exempt from the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act.

The same conditions that the Tribunal deemed to be racial discrimination still exist, and the impact on the individuals this effects is still the same. Legislating this loophole has not changed the fact that the NSW Government is discriminating against a group of people based solely on their race.

Why now?

During this pandemic, international students have been hit the hardest. Unlike other states who draw large numbers of international students, in NSW they have not been afforded access to any direct financial support. Many are unable to pay rent and have been forced to couch surf with friends, or rely on other insecure or even unsafe housing. Many more are relying on the kindness of strangers to keep from going hungry.

Providing concessions on travel will not resolve these problems, but it is a small thing that the NSW Government can do right now.

The NSW economy relies on the export of tertiary education for a significant proportion of its budget every year and yet it remains the only state in the country that does not support international students through travel concessions.

This has not gone unnoticed by the international community and the reputation that NSW relies upon to attract international students has been severely damaged.

The NSW Government must support international students especially at this time and end the discriminatory practice of denying them travel concessions.

“Student transport concessions should be extended to international students to address equity and student welfare issues. International students face increased student welfare and safety issues and tend to live further away from their place of study. In some cases they have trouble accessing public transport”.

NSW International Education & Research Industry
Action Plan, September 2012

Timeline

3 June 2020: Bill introduced in the Legislative Assembly.

4 June 2020: Bill second read by Jenny Leong MP

18 June 2020: Bill expected to come up for debate in the Legislative Assembly.

JENNY LEONG MP
MEMBER FOR NEWTOWN