



The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family & Human Services
House Of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

RE Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas.

1/ Inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes.

During the past 6 years I have been in contact with other waiting families in different States, and I have found the fees and waiting times for each State seem to vary considerably.

I am aware of couples from Queensland who had no alternative but to move to another state in order for them to complete or start their family.

When most couples decide to adopt from overseas they do not anticipate the process taking up to 6 years.

It has taken our family along time to finally complete our family of 3 children. We started in 1991 with IVF and finished in 1996 to have 2 children. For our 3rd child we choose adoption instead of IVF, which certainly would of cost the taxpayer money, and in December 1998 we rang the Department of families to begin our intercountry adoption process. Our file took 3 years to process in Queensland, and 3 years to allocate us our daughter in Thailand.

The Queensland Department fees involved has increased considerably since we started our process, but the service remains the same.

2/ Inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children & those provided to families who have adopted children from Overseas.

I can personally tell you the inconsistencies between families with their own birth children & a child adopted from overseas, as I have had 2 birth children & 1 adopted from Thailand in March 05

Overseas adoption is very costly, firstly you pay the Department of Families to process your file, then you pay hundreds for a service worker to visit you 6 times in order for her to judge you as a parent, wife, and what sort of a person you are in society. You have to do an essay approx 15 pages about yourself from the day you were born. My husband and I took 3 weeks off work just to accomplish this report. (Couples that have their own birth children do not have to do this) You then get back a copy of the report, which the social worker has written about you. I can personally say they can certainly get away with a lot of personal criticism, which most people would not tolerate. But you put up with it because you really want to have a child. You pay for accountants to do financial reports, Doctors to do medicals every 2 years, X-rays every 5 years, and references from friends every 2 years even after you bring home your child. At the end of the day if the social worker personally likes you and you have enough money you are approved to adopt, and your file goes to the country you choose. Once this country allocates you a child, you have to

organise with no ones help to fill in the immigration papers, which cost \$1200.00. Four weeks latter you either get clearance or not to pick up your child from their birth country, the costs to travel to these counties can be from \$12000 to \$35000. Twelve months after being home with our child, we then have the costs of flying from Queensland to Canberra to the Thai Embassy to finalise our adoption. Going through IVF and having my child born in a private Hospital never costs me anything close to the amount I have spent on adopting from overseas. Having said that, we both feel the money we have spend to achieve our dream was definitely worth it and we would have sold all our assets if needed, to have our daughter, she is so beautiful and we love her the same as our birth children. We looked into adopting another child from overseas when Queensland opened the expression's of interests in 2004, but decided not to proceed after reading the booklet and discovering that the process is even more difficult and expensive from our first adoption.

Another major inconsistency in the area of benefits and entitlements between birth and adopted children from overseas; the major one that really angers me is the fact the I am not entitled to the Maternity payment, because my child was 17 months old when she came into my care. The first time I rang Centrelink the gentleman told me I would receive the payment, so I filled out the forms and the lady in the office at Centrelink told me I would not receive it. I do not know of any adoptions from overseas that have had their child entrusted to the parents care before 26 weeks of age. It is impossible to receive a child from Thailand before they turn one year old, as the Thai authorities search for any relatives of the child before the child is legally considered to be available for adoption. We would have loved to receive our daughter at birth. Should I be discriminated against because she was allocated to me at 14 months?

After reading the booklet from Centrelink I clearly see that it will not be paid to us. Parents with adopted children still have the same costs as parents with birth children. They also have to buy all the baby furniture and clothing for their children.

While we were in Thailand we met a couple from Sweden, They told us their Government gives them a paid maternity payment of 80% of their normal income for 18 months when they bring their child back to Sweden. In Australia we are told we are not allowed to work for 12 months once we return with our children and they pay us no maternity payment. If I had another birth child I can put my child into childcare for as long as I want and get paid maternity payment. I would not think of putting my adopted child into a childcare for 12 months or more, but I feel I should not be dictated to by governments, saying no child care for 12 months, unless they say this to all parents. It should be my choice, unless the government pays me to stay at home.

Another problem I have endured is the immunisation payment. I have received my daughter's immunization booklet in Thai. Centre link has told me to get it translated and I have to present them with an Immu13 form. I know my daughter's immunization is up to date as Thailand did email to the Department with her immunisations with the allocation information. I hardly think its worth me finding and paying for a Thai professional to translate the book and then go to a doctor and pay him more money to fill out a form for Centrelink so I can receive Two hundred dollars. My time and energy would be best spent with my daughter.

My husband and I have worked all our lives and paid a lot of taxes and we educate our children in private schools. I have given up my job and bookkeeping business to stay home with my daughter, as the Department stipulated. Our income has been

halved while we still have the same bills and education fees to pay. It would be helpful to receive the Maternity payment,

My story is no different to other families that adopt their children from overseas, they pay the same money and give up their jobs, and then find out the government must not think adoption is important enough to worry about paying the parents a Maternity Allowance. Especially when the payment is not income tested and is available to millionaires.

I ask how would you feel in this circumstance?

It seems very unfair when I see young girls who have children so they do not have to work, taxpayers will support them and their children for a long time. Then I meet parents like myself who cannot have their own birth children unless they have IVF, They have to work hard just to pay for the adoption costs, they pay their taxes only to receive no help when they need it over the 12 months when they stay at home to be loving mothers or fathers to these beautiful children.

I call for greater recognition of the adoptive process and for appropriate support for parents that have adopted children from overseas, and I feel that we are being discriminated against as adoptive parents, especially in regards to the maternity payment. And I strongly feel this payment should be backdated to July 2004. To help those parents who have returned with their children this would help them recover a small amount of cost in travel.

Yours Sincerely
