

**From:** Tiffany Gray [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 21 April 2005 4:53 PM  
**To:** Committee, FHS (REPS)  
**Subject:** [REDACTED] Submission re- federal inquiry into  
Inter-country placement adoptions assistance

### **Federal Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to draw the Australian Government's attention to several areas of inconsistency with regards to Inter-country Adoption.

The first issue which needs to be addressed is the Australian Government's view on families formed through adoption. If the Government recognises that families formed through adoption are equal in status to families with biological children then all benefits afforded these families should, without question, be available to families formed through inter-country adoption. At present with the discrepancies in benefits and child cost assistance for families with biological children and adopted children there is disturbing inequality and discrimination being shown by our Australian government. I appeal to the Government to rectify these inconsistencies, some of which I draw to your attention in the following submission.

Maternity payment should be provided to families when a new child joins their family regardless of age. After all, this payment is given to families "for the extra costs incurred" with a new baby. Whether the child is 5 days, 5 weeks, 5 years or even 15 years there are still "extra costs incurred", some may argue that the costs increase as the child grows.

Maternity leave is another area of concern. I find it relieving and encouraging that there is a regulation in place that allows parents of an adopted child to 12 months unpaid leave. However, the flaw in this regulation lies in the phrase, "on the basis that the child will be under the age of 5 years on the day of the placement". Extensive research has shown that inter-country adopted children have special needs in regards to attaching to their family and parents. Children adopted at 5 years of age or older have usually been living in an institution in a 3rd world country where it is likely they experienced emotional and physical deprivation or have lived in an abusive family environment and been removed from the care of that family. Most older children of inter-country adoption need to adjust to a new language and culture when they join their family in Australia. They need the time to trust and bond with their new families. These older children face enormous challenges, as do their adoptive families. For this very reason the regulation must be altered to allow for parents of inter-country adopted children to have 12 months maternity leave regardless of the child's age.

In addition to unpaid adoption leave not being available to people adopting older children, there is nothing that protects adoptive parents from being discriminated against in comparison to biological parents with respect to paid leave. Many awards and workplace agreements that have paid maternity leave do not have paid adoption leave or have adoption entitlements that are much less than maternity entitlements. According to the Work and the Family Unit of the Department of

Employment and Workplace Relations 29% of workplace agreements have paid maternity leave but only 1% have paid adoption leave.

Furthermore, I call on the Australian Government to assist families financially with intercountry adoption. Intercountry adoption is incredibly costly, varying from approximately \$20000 - \$40000 in NSW considering DoCS fees, overseas travel, legal fees and immigration fees. With both federal and state governments so highly subsidising birth via Medicare and the private health insurance subsidy one would think that a government which supports equal opportunities would also support adoption financially. Wasn't a high profile member of our present government, in recent months, calling upon the Australian public to have 3 children - "one for mum, one for dad and one for the nation"! Surely if we as population are being called upon by our own government to have more children the very same government would see the sense and the benefit in financially, and otherwise, supporting families formed through intercountry adoption!

Whilst considering the costs associated with intercountry adoption I would also like to draw to your attention that intercountry adoptive families also pay \$1245 in Visa application fees for each child they adopt. Again with the federal and state governments so highly subsidising birth, adoption should be similarly subsidized by government and visa fees for children of adoption waived.

On a NSW state level I would like the government to look to the inconsistencies between state and territory in terms of government incurred fees. In NSW we pay the highest amount in fees to DoCS at \$9700. Adoption should never come down to the wealth of the applicants to adopt but the needs of the child must be paramount. If parents of biological children were required to pay similar amounts in birth it would be considered an unreasonable and outrageous burden on families. Why is it different for families formed through adoption?

An equally distressing concern is the length of time it takes here in NSW to adopt a child. Despite increasing fees the state government has not increased staff numbers in their adoption processing section and adoption processing is currently distressingly slow. There are 3 full time case workers dealing with all of NSW applicants. It is almost robbery that we pay the state government \$9700 to receive such poor service - not that the DoCS caseworkers are performing badly but simply that there are more adoption applications than they are able to keep up with! Currently it is taking 6+ months for applications to be approved after recommendations are made by social workers, whereas in other states this usually takes a few weeks. This sort of lag is experienced throughout the adoption process. How is this time lag benefitting the child in the orphanage overseas as he or she lies unstimulated in a cot with no physical affection or basic needs being met when there are hundreds of families here in NSW waiting...waiting... and wanting a child to love and nurture?

Your sincerely,

Tiffany Gray.