

From: Rebecca Laguna [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 19 May 2005 2:34 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS); Bishop, Bronwyn (MP)
Subject: Maternity payment for newly adoptive children

Dear Ms Bishop

I am writing regarding the welcome extension of the payment to new parents of adopted children of whom we are a part.

We adopted our longed for daughter in September 2004 just as she had turned 2. The process took five years and cost in excess of \$30,000. This after spending \$65,000 over a ten year period on IVF. We now rent a house in Sydney. You can imagine our distress at the news that the age cut off excludes us from receiving the \$3000 maternity payment. I don't think you can call infertility a lifestyle choice, nor play semantics with what it is to be a new parent.

In China, the handover of our daughter was incredibly traumatic. Lili regressed from a potty trained walking, talking 24 month old to a confused, grieving, non-walking, bottle fed, hysterical, nappy wearing baby with no language whatsoever (she spoke a dialect of Cantonese that not even our guides understood) and stayed that way for the next two weeks. Eight months later she has made much progress but is deeply suspicious of strangers and insecure in any new situation (being from rural South China this means everything from baths to cars to city skyscrapers).

DOCS had approved us for a child between the ages of 2-4 years because at 34 years of age (at the time) and with a somewhat older husband (62) they believed that we would not cope with a baby. Naturally, we would have preferred to be with our daughter as early as possible, rather than waiting until she was 2, however, these decisions are always out of the adoptive parent's hands and left to the State. There are very few of us who choose to adopt older children because of the increased difficulty in attachment and bonding as well as the psychological and physical developmental delays associated with adopting older children. But for those of us who are matched with older babies (for they do regress to infant behaviour for a long time) adoptive parents face not only the exact same payments that biological parents face (such as new cots, bottles, clothing etc) but we also have the added stress of medical and psychological therapies (such as speech pathology and mandatory immigration health checks) that come with welcoming a new child into the family.

Along with the euphoria of our first and only child being placed into our arms the process left us feeling as if we had been in a car accident, much the same as having given birth I expect. And even though we are brand new parents by law with the exact same responsibility, dutybound to love and protect and care for this child (not to mention the profound love I feel for her) as a primary school teacher in a public school I am not treated as other new mothers are - my maternity leave payment is half that of birthmothers and called adoption leave. I guess they believe I'm half a mother. Certainly this new age criteria excluding us from the maternity payment leaves me feeling half a mother. I actually went back to work three weeks ago (for one day a week) but this experiment didn't work. Lili became deeply distressed. We undid a lot of the good work we had done - I've had to quit my job and lose my right of return to my position but these are the challenges faced by all new parents asking when is the right time to return to work.

Add to that the fact that your child has been in an orphanage for the first part of his/her life and making the right decision becomes that much more compelling? I am learning that flexibility is the key to parenting. I'm very lucky in that my husband's business can support our family. There are many other adoptive parents who can not keep one parent at home for great lengths of time. \$3000 would help enormously.

So, finally, we request your support and advocacy in changing the new regulation - that the maternity payment is for infants up to 2 years of age which demonstrates a deep misunderstanding of the challenges faced by all new parents, regardless of the age of the child. It really needs to be amended to include the many toddlers who are also adopted. After all, we are new parents, most first time parents - not half parents - but real parents of real children with real needs who deserve to be treated as such.

Kind regards

Rebecca and Janek Laguna

mama to Liliyan Keheng Laguna born 5th September, 2002 and adopted from QinZhou, South China 20th September, 2004.

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