

From: Kathie Leckenby [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 18 February 2005 9:21 AM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: International adoption

To the committee,

My name is Kathie (Kathryn) Leckenby and I live in [REDACTED] on the northside of [REDACTED].

Seven years ago my husband and I adopted 2 boys, siblings aged 3 & 5, from Ethiopia. We already had 4 children born to us, then aged 7, 8, 13 & 15 years old. It has been the most rewarding, and frustrating, experience of our lives.

The problems we encountered include:

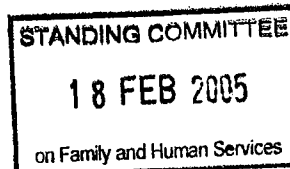
1/ We were initially knocked back as I am overweight. I had an excellent medical but the Queensland department had a weight policy (couldn't exceed a BMI of 30) and routinely dismissed our application even though we fulfilled all legislative requirements. After a 15 month 'battle' which included going to numerous medical specialists to substantiate my health, going to my local member, going to the Ombudsman and the press, the decision was overturned by the then Director General, Rev Alan Male. He also abolished the policy on BMI, but as soon as there was a change in Queensland Government, they changed the policy back. I could have applied through many other states without my weight being a problem. I have 2 sisters in ACT who both have done multiple adoptions while being overweight and it was not an issue, particularly as the relinquishing country (in our case, Ethiopia) did not have a problem with it.

2/ Also due to differences in state laws, we were unable to apply for adoption again as we had more than 4 kids under 18. By the time our 2 elder sons reached 18 the Queensland program was shut (supposedly for 12 months while they caught up on the backlog of applicants, but it ended up being about 3 years). Now that they have an system of 'Expression of interest' the department can pick and choose who they want to process with no comeback for applicants left in the 'pool'. There has been no indication of when they will open the expression of interest again, but we suspect it will be years.

3/ I recommend to people who call me for information about adoption that they move to ACT or Tasmania as they have a better system and there is a much better chance that the people will be able to successfully adopt through those states.

4/ There has been very little work done to establish new programs with different countries. Despite many countries having signed the Hague treaty we have still not established programs with them. South Africa, for instance, is a Hague signatory and has an adoption program running already to the USA, but Australia hasn't done it yet.

5/ Adoptive families are discriminated against by the Australian government in so much as we are not entitled to the 'baby bonus' as the children are generally over 26 weeks when they arrive in Australia. If the Baby bonus is to help offset the expense of adding a baby to the family, adopted children should be entitled to even more so as we have huge expenses in adding an adopted child to our family.



6/ The cost, and service provided, differs dramatically state to state from approx \$2000 to \$10,000. This is only the cost of application and assessment, there are huge expenses incurred in travel and fees to the relinquishing country. I do not know of many situations where tax paying Australian citizens have to pay for the Public Service to 'work' for them.

7/ I believe that there has to be a Federal benchmark on suitability criteria, process and expenses. There should not be such huge discrepancies state to state.

8/ My sister, Julia Rollings, lives in the ACT. She has 6 adopted children, 5 of which would not have been allowed to be adopted in Queensland (because they were over 5, out of birth order, disabled or less than 2 years between some of the siblings) and yet you would be hard pressed to find a more dedicated family.

For 9 years I have been campaigning and working towards better International adoptions in Australia and I am disillusioned. Every time we make progress, something happens to knock us back again. We are a big country with a big heart, we need to show it in this win-win situation where families are blessed by their new additions and the children get a chance at growing up in a loving family.

Thanks, Kathie Leckenby - QLD

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