

30 May 2005

The Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
By email: fhs.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

I am writing to you as the parent of a child adopted from overseas. The only negative experiences we have endured to date have been entirely due to our encounters with DOCS. The process appears to be geared towards favoured programmes. Should you wish to apply to any other countries then the time frames quoted by DOCS to process the Australian end of your application are more often than not significantly longer.

A short overview of our recent second adoption application is noted below, I have not given an overview of our first adoption application but suffice to say it was significantly worse.

We lodged our Expression of Interest for a Second Child in April 2003, a month after we returned from overseas with our child. Our application was made as soon as we returned to Australia because we knew how slow the procedure was and how important it is for overseas adoptive children to have siblings from their country of birth.

We were advised by our case worker at DOCS that the next seminar was due to be held in November and that we should have no problem attending as we had full care of our baby since February 2003. Our case worker was overridden in her learned decision to allow us to attend the November second timers seminar, as we had not been back in Australia for 10 months. After a lot of unnecessary discussion we were allowed to attend the November seminar (a prerequisite to lodging an application for adoption). Our application for a second child was lodged in early December 2003 but was not approved until the end of October 2004 (almost 11 months later). We did not have to provide one piece of additional information in this regard as we met all requirements.

We now wait for an allocation of a sibling for our child, which is not foreseeable within the next 18 months. Our child was 6 weeks old when we were allocated and will be approximately 4 years old when we get a second allocation.

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- It is common ground that Australia has a declining birth rate and that this problem should be addressed, so why is the NSW State and the Federal Government hindering Australian families who have chosen the adoptive path by charging exorbitant fees?
- It is common ground that NSW DOCS is severely under funded so why has it taken so long for the accreditation provisions for NGOs to be developed and why has it been made so unworkable?

The inconsistencies between the financial assistance provided by the Federal Government to biological families and that provided to international adoptive families is inequitable. The costs involved in forming a family through international adoption is significant, these costs can create financial hardship for adoptive families and can stop some infertile couples from pursuing the adoption path. Australian families who wish to adopt have paid their dues the same as Australian biological families and should be given incentives as a matter of course. Could it be that Government does not support international adoption as a way of creating a family?

I believe the Committee should consider the following recommendations:-

- 1. Remove the 26 week age limit for the Maternity Payment. As the majority of overseas adoptive children are older than 26 weeks of age when they return to Australia.**
- 2. Provide a tax credit or rebate system offering financial relief for adoptive parents as is done in many other countries, ie USA.**
- 3. Remove Federal Government department fees associated with adoption and recommend the removal of State Government department fees associated with adoption.**
- 4. Develop a National Accreditation mechanism to accredit NGOs. Which allows them the ability to deliver adoption services as their primary service.**
- 5. Provide funding for NGOs to establish themselves, so they may give professional services to families.**

Please consider the children who need a family and also put yourselves in an intercountry adoptive parents shoes when considering the recommendations. All children deserve a loving family.

Yours faithfully

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