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20/04/05

Firstly I would request that you suppress our names and address as we do not wish our privacy or future application to adopt be jeopardised by material contained in our submission.

The Secretary of the Committee
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Parliament House
Canberra
Via email: fhs.reps@aph.gov.au

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into Intercountry Adoptions and how the Australian Government can better assist Australian families who have or are adopting from overseas.

Dear Committee Members.

My husband and I intend to adopt from China and have been pursuing the process for over a year and a half. We have two major concerns at this point in our experiences. The first being the amount of disinformation and refusal to supply information to us by the ACT Adoptions Unit of Family Services and the second being the lack of financial support the Australian Government offers to adoptive parents as opposed to those having children biologically.

Over the last two years my husband and I attended compulsory seminars and information sessions, lodged an expression of interest, met with staff members from the Adoptions unit and then lodged our application to adopt. We were told of no circumstances that would impede our application to adopt when we discussed our lifestyle and plans with members of the Unit.

During this time we repeatedly asked about the total cost of adopting and at each point were told "You don't need to know that yet". We were specifically told that we would only be handed one piece of information at a time as the Unit didn't feel that prospective parents needed to know everything in advance. We asked if there were a requirement that we were home owners to be told that it was **not** a factor.

Once our application was lodged we were called in to be told that the Unit was refusing to assess us as we didn't own a house and had credit card debt and personal loans in our names. Please keep in mind that on the same day that we were refused assessment and told that we were not financially stable because we were not home owners and had no other substantial assets, the Unit banked out application and home study fee of \$3208. We were then told that because we were not home owners we would need to be completely debt free in order to lodge our application again and be

able to show that we had \$15 000 in savings in the bank before our application would be processed. To my knowledge and after phoning other Adoptive Parent associations and no one else we have met who has lodged their application through the ACT Department or in any other state has been given this information. My husband and I are both in well-paid and permanent employment. None of this was taken into account when we discussed the issue with our social worker. Instead we were patronised and it was suggested that without a house, should one of us be unable to provide financially we would not be able to care for an adopted child.

It took over a month to be reimbursed our fee. A second refund arrived weeks later which we were told it was then our responsibility to post back as it had been the Department's mistake.

Our preparations in good faith had cost us thousands of dollars. Postponing our assessment another twelve months in order to meet the arbitrary requirement that we be debt free will cost more money in that police reports, medicals, etc., that have a limited validity period, we should have delayed, and will need to be done again.

If ALL of the information had been provided to us when we requested it we would not find ourselves now in the unhappy situation of being refused assessment. While we are well aware there can be no guarantees, had this information been in the documentation provided at the initial seminars we might have been better prepared when applying. Knowing we had to meet such an unreasonable and arbitrary requirement would have made a significant difference to our timing and our financial goals. As far as we can tell, the judgement was not based on any economic fact, or definitive policy, and given the limited information available to us, this decision, in fact, seems highly subjective, and bordering on discriminatory.

I would ask that the Committee recommend that ALL information pertaining to the eligibility of prospective adoptive parents be supplied at initial seminars and that this practise should be standard in each state and territory. It should also recommend that all information requested by an applicant and pertaining to their lodgement be provided without refusal. I would also ask the Committee to clarify each state or territories' requirements that adoptive parents be home owners or completely debt free with \$15 000 in the bank.

The second recommendation I would like to see is that the Government's Maternity Payment be made available to adoptive parents regardless of the age of their child upon allocation and adoption. The cost of inter-country adoption is phenomenal compared to that of having children biologically and yet the Government does not financially support parents who choose to adopt or who adopt because they cannot have children biologically. In recent days the media has reported that the upcoming Federal budget will recommend that parents wishing to pursue IVF will now only be supported by Medicare for three cycles of treatment per year and for women over forty only three cycles full stop. It would appear that the Government is slowly withdrawing most financial assistance for parents who cannot conceive children naturally and who choose IVF or adoption whilst rewarding those who can produce biological children to help populate Australia. The Government should financially support all parents regardless of how their children came to be in their lives.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

[REDACTED]

Canberra