

22 April 2005
The Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services

Dear Committee Secretary

We have one biological child and are currently having our application to adopt from overseas processed. In our dealings we have found the relevant state department to be both efficient and professional, but wish to raise concerns that may affect other applicants.

1. Inconsistency between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoptions.

There are considerable inconsistencies between states in this regard. In Queensland it is not possible for anyone to even apply to adopt at present, while long delays are forecast for those who happen to be lucky enough to have been able to have their names on the current Expression of Interest List. The adoption of a child from overseas sometimes seems to be seen as a jealously guarded privilege to be allocated to 'deserving' couples who have waited for 3 or more years, rather than an opportunity for a needy child to be given a loving home.

Furthermore, the anticipated waiting times differ considerably between states. These factors create disadvantages for couples whose employment requires them to move interstate. Members of the Australian Defence Force are particularly disadvantaged in this regard, with one couple we know being forced to endure a considerable wait to adopt their second overseas child, while another couple is currently unable to apply. In the case of the couple who were able to apply, this inconsistency between states will increase the age gap between their children and will not enhance the balance of their family makeup. While it is very important that applicants are carefully assessed, it seems illogical that waiting times and assessment procedures need to vary so much. It is also unfair that some Australian citizens, by virtue of their residence in Queensland, are unable to even be considered for adoption.

Further inconsistencies arise when the situation facing Australians resident abroad is considered. My sister (who is married to a Canadian) lives in the United States. If she wished to adopt from overseas through either the Canadian or United States system and subsequently return to Australia, the procedure would be much easier than if she returned to Australia to adopt.

The approval process is also affected by the fact that some states are more active than others in opening up programs with new relinquishing countries. We strongly believe that adoption should be in the best interests of the child, but having worked / travelled in the developing world, find it extremely difficult to take seriously any government documentation or advice that claims 'there are more potential parents than there are potential adoptive children'.

2. *Inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted children from overseas.*

As stated, we have one birth child and are currently having our application to adopt from overseas processed. While we were provided with financial assistance to undergo IVF, there is no financial assistance given to those who adopt from overseas. Due to restrictions regarding the age of children, it is highly likely that we would be unable to access the 'baby bonus', and in Queensland one partner is obliged to stay at home for 12 months after the arrival of the child, further reducing family income. There are very good reasons for this in relation to family bonding, but this ruling does reduce family income in comparison to those who give birth to children in Australia. Despite our anticipated expenses of perhaps \$20,000 to \$30,000 (this figure includes costs of flying up to two adopted children back from Ethiopia with us), we have no expectation of ever receiving any government assistance at all to defray these costs. It is my understanding that in the United States, adoption costs are partly tax deductible, and perhaps in Australia consideration might be given to such an option.

At the moment, the fact remains that the cost of having a birth child (either through IVF or non-assisted) is heavily supported both directly and indirectly by governments at all levels, while adoption from overseas is funded by the individual.

Sincerely

Richard and Pauline Gehrman

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