

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 20 April 2005 4:45 PM  
**To:** Committee, FHS (REPS)  
**Subject:** Submission – Adoption of Children from Overseas

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter is a submission to the Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas. As prospective adoptive parents in the process of adoption, we have a number of concerns we wish to raise that we believe are relevant to this inquiry.

The main changes we would like to see in relation to adoption practices.

#### **Reduction in costs to adopt**

We are aware that there are different charges for adoption across the States (this in itself is a problem), but speaking from a Victorian perspective, we believe the costs are too high. For a first adoption, the Victorian Dept. of Human Services fee is over \$6000, and over \$4000 for a second adoption. However, these fees are only the tip of the iceberg. We also have to pay for such things as:

medicals,  
notarisation of documents,  
postage of overseas documents,  
fees to the overseas orphanage,  
DIMA visa fees (over \$1200),  
donations (expected) to overseas orphanages,  
travel costs to go and collect the child.

This can easily average over \$15,000. While we realise that there need to be some costs involved in adoption, we don't understand why local adoptions have a very low fee, while overseas adoptions have such a high one.

We would like to see:

- a) Lower State fees for adoption without a commensurate reduction in the service.
- b) Waiving of the DIMA \$1200+ visa fee
- c) Tax deductibility (or similar scheme) of adoption costs

#### **Equal access to government benefits**

Regardless of how a child comes into an Australian family, we believe the child and his/her parents should be entitled to the same government financial assistance as every other family. Adoptive parents have all the same "setting up" costs (e.g. cot, pram, clothes, etc) as birth parents and all the same ongoing costs (e.g. food, clothing, education, etc) — so there should be no reason why they cannot receive the same government assistance, regardless of the age the child was when he/she came into the family (most adoptive children arrive at over 26 weeks of age).

We would like to see:

- a) Maternity Allowance for all adoptive parents
- b) Any future government initiatives to apply equally to all parents

## **Government assistance in disseminating information**

Once a child is allocated to a family, it appears that there is very little information/support provided to tell parents what government benefits they are entitled to. Eg Family Tax Benefits A & B, the Baby Bonus or any other relevant information.

Many adoptive parents only discover their eligibility for such payments through talking with other adoptive parents. This service should part of the end to end service, even if delivered as a 'pack'.

We would like to see:

a) A letter sent to all adoptive parents on arrival of their child, outlining what government benefits they are entitled to, and how to go about obtaining them. (Birth parents are given forms to fill out in the hospital — no one does this for adoptive parents).

b) Clear communication about what legal, and other, processes need to be done when a child arrives (e.g.

does the child need to do something to get Australian citizenship; how does the child get added to a Medicare card before their adoption is legalised; can the child have an Australian passport, etc.)

## **Opportunity for Process Improvement**

The process can take at least two years from initial application to allocation. Each step is done in serial, with long elapsed times for actual effort. There must be opportunity to undertake some activities in parallel, eg Parent projects, while waiting for information sessions.

We thank you for the opportunity you've given us to express some of our views on adoption issues and look forward to hearing the results of your inquiry.

Yours Sincerely,

**Haydn and Lotty Neal**