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Sent: Friday, 22 April 2005 8:18 AM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)

Subject: Submission to Standing Committee

The Secretariat
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services

Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas

It is a great encouragement that the committee is conducting the above-mentioned inquiry. Australia as a nation has shown its level of compassion to reach out to those in need time and time again. Overseas adoption is one expression of this compassion.

Our journey into overseas adoption began in December 1999 and came to fruition during 2004, a 2 year 4 month old boy from Thailand named Kaisorn became a part of our lives and our family and thereby starting another journey □ that of accepting and nurturing the life of a little boy. While we support the process of adoption in that applicants are to be properly assessed, our main concern is the seemingly unnecessary time the whole process takes, so any streamlining of the adoption process is welcome.

Point 1 Any inconsistencies between State Departments.

My only comment is that there are unavoidable differences between the requirements and fees imposed by donor countries and this could influence the overall cost for applicants regardless of which state of Australia they reside in. For example fees to orphanages vary considerably; China imposes a fee in the order of \$US3000 while Thai Orphanages will accept a donation. (We purchased a colour television at the request of the Orphanage Director.) Therefore the Secretariat would do well to become aware of such differences. State Heads of Departments would be a source of such information.

It is our belief that State Department fees do vary. Other submissions probably go further in to this issue. We would like to say that the fees imposed by our department here in Tasmania could perhaps be used as an Australian wide model of fees; we certainly do not want fees to increase as a result of the inquiry.

Another difference is the Tasmanian Department's use of either staff or contract Adoption Case Officers. Contractors are able to concentrate on the task at hand while Department Staff will be juggling several roles at once. Our approval was managed by a staff member and the whole process took more than twice as long when compared to friends' approvals that had contractors managing their cases.

Point 2 Any inconsistencies with benefits paid to biological children to adopted children.

Our family consists of two biological children, Thomas (13) and Jordan (11) and as mentioned Kaisorn (now 3). We arrived with Kaisorn on 21 July 2004 and were

immediate eligible for Medicare and Centerlink payments. When it was income tax return time, we discovered that we were not eligible to claim the Government's Ongoing Baby Bonus for children under 5 born before 1 July 2004 because Kaisorn is not yet in our legal custody. The adoption arrangement between Thailand and Australia does not follow Hauge Convention but is only finalised after +12 months and by an Adoption Order by the Tasmanian Court. Only then will Kaisorn be legally our child and then we will be eligible to claim the bonus.

Although outside of the terms of reference, we would like to make a comment on the Australia practice of overseas adoption. Australia is a signatory to the Hauge Convention but seems not to be pursuing all the benefits and terms of agreement of signatories. Why is it that State Departments are only following already established programs and thereby limiting the number of countries from which children can be adopted?

Finally could we also say that Kaisorn is enriching our family. While we certainly agree with recent comments from the Minister that any overseas adopted child has special needs, if you could just meet Kaisorn your heart will go out to him, and you will appreciate just a little more how important it is that Australians continue to pursue overseas adoption.

Yours Faithfully,

Mark and Christa de Hoog

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