

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services

Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into your inquiry regarding the Adoption of Children from Overseas. We wish to highlight the following issues in response to the two areas of your inquiry:-

1. Any inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoption.

A) *The difference in time frames from one State to another*

We appreciate that the time taken from lodging an Application/Expression of Interest to a Final Adoption Decree being issued, involves many steps and at times applicants are addressing varying issues. However it is evident from speaking directly to couples who have adopted in different States to our own, that there is a real difference in the time taken by various Departments and Adoption Agencies. This becomes a real disadvantage for couples who are faced with an age issue and are trying to meet requirements from overseas countries who have set age limits for adoptive parents.

B) *The difference in eligibility requirements from one State to another.*

Since we all live in the same country, it is difficult to accept why there has to be any difference in eligibility criteria from one State to another, yet there is.

C) *The difference in costs from one State to another.*

It is alarming to see the difference in costs that adoptive parents are expected to pay, depending on the State you live, which is of course on top of the fees which are payable to the overseas adoption agencies. I fail to see why some States would consider processing adoption applications as part of their 'core business' while other States opt for a 'user pay' principle. After all we are talking about the placement of children who are in need of a family to love and care for them, a home to live in and a community to embrace them. Surely State Government adoption fees should not be out of the reach of average income earners who are infertile yet wish to fulfill their dream of raising children via overseas adoption.

D) *Some States deal with overseas countries that other States do not.*

Once again, it is difficult to understand why some Australian States have active adoption programs with countries that other States do not, the reasons seem to be known only to that Government Department. Also it is evident that some States are proactive in developing new programs with overseas countries while other States only pay lip service.

E) *\$2,000-00 Assessment Fees*

In Queensland when adopting a child from overseas, the Department requires you to pay \$2,000-00 in order for home assessments to be carried out. This involves the employment of a social worker to carry out interviews in your home. The same process occurs for those couples adopting a child from Queensland yet the adoptive parents are not requested to pay a \$2,000-00 fee. We feel this is discriminatory to those adopting children from overseas.

2. Any 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.

F) *\$3,000-00 Maternity Payment*

The Federal Government criteria states that a claimant must lodge an effective claim within 26 weeks of the baby's birth, or in the case of adopting parents, within 26 weeks of the baby coming into their care on or after the 1 July 2004 and provided the baby is less than 26 weeks of age. Our child was 28 weeks of age and so we were ineligible for the Maternity Payment.

It is interesting when you compare the costs of Baby Formula for a 4 week old compared to a 28 week old. The costs faced by adoptive parents are far greater than those faced by birth parents. The Maternity Payment was supposed to assist with the costs around the time of birth. Surely then adoptive parents should have 26 weeks from the time they assume care to apply for the Maternity Payment without the child having to be less than 26 weeks of age. In reality not too many adoptive parents qualify for the Maternity Payment.

Also, we can provide two examples of adoptive parents being first denied the Maternity Payment even though their children were under the 26 weeks of age. They were put through unnecessary stress to eventually receive their payment. One took 6 months and the other sort the intervention of their Federal Member of Parliament to receive their payment rather than to put up with unnecessary requests from the Family Assistance Office.

In closing, we believe that overseas adoption is a wonderful gift to the adoptive parents, their immediate family, the community at large and by no means last, to the adoptive child themselves. Having our adopted child part of our lives is a blessing. And it is a wonderful way for communities to embrace children from other countries. Unfortunately until there is a 'political will' in Australia to assist adoptive parents rather than to place hurdles in their path, a lot of children in the world will still remain in need of the basic rights of food, water, shelter and love.

We hope your inquiry into adoption of children from overseas will bear fruit in the years to come that will benefit children in need of adoptive families.

Yours faithfully,

B & D Comerford