

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 18 April 2005 10:08 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas

Dear Sirs/Madams,

My husband and I wish to congratulate you on the establishment of this inquiry, as the issue of overseas adoption requires immediate government review, support, recognition and assistance.

Presently, there is much frustration, stress, financial distress, red tape and especially discrimination against parents wishing to form families via overseas adoption. IVF is not for everyone, yet it is generously funded and Medicare backed. Local adoption is not a viable option to most couples, as there are so few babies available now in Australia. (Adoption is a dirty word in Australia, the government supports single mothers so generously and over 100,000 unwanted babies are aborted each year in Australia.) The only option then is to attempt overseas adoption, and be prepared to go through the very difficult, discriminatory, intrusive and expensive process. Here is our story to give you a typical idea.

My husband and I have one biological child. Unable to have any more, we then adopted a baby from India, and we are currently awaiting a second allocation. We waited 2 years and 3 months for our first adopted child (from program commencement here in Australia to returning home from India with our daughter.) Our second attempt has now taken 19 months – another very long frustrating pregnancy. We have dutifully complied with all the requirements of the DHS, with little support or information from them, yet we have paid them substantial sums for their service. Yes, they have been thorough and they need to be, but it is very hard to justify such costs. And there will be more when we finally receive our phone call.

Below is an outline of the costs for our first adoption. We anticipate that there will be greater expense and increases in some previous costs for our second adoption. We contrast our costs with those of my sister who had a biological child here in Australia recently. She was subsidized considerably for the birth of her child under the Maternity Allowance scheme. Had she chosen not to go privately, she would have had all her costs (and more) reimbursed under this scheme. Had there been children available for adoption here in Australia, we would have been allocated a very young baby, well within the specified 26 weeks of age period, and we too would have qualified for the Maternity Allowance. With overseas adoption, the complex processes involved means that children are not usually allocated to overseas families until they are 4 months or older. By the time court appearances, medical examinations, document translation, passports, visas and travel etc are arranged, the child is well beyond the 26 weeks age necessary to qualify for the Maternity Allowance. So families adopting from overseas miss out on this assistance altogether. (Families adopting from Korea, however, are eligible for the Maternity Allowance, as babies are allocated in Korea at 1-2 months, and the child arrives in Australia before 26 weeks of age. This means that a small group of parents is privileged

in receiving the maternity payment, whilst the remainder miss out. This is absurd when a family with a Korean child arriving in Australia in the 25th or 26th week of the child's life could apply for and receive the allowance, whereas, another family arriving in Australia with a child from any other country in that child's 27th week of life and beyond, is ineligible. Those families adopting from countries other than Korea therefore incur double discrimination.)

Natural Birth:

Overseas Adoption:

Obstetrics – approx. \$2500 to \$4000 or
Public System - \$0.00
Baby Goods (pram, cot etc) – up to \$2000

Dept of Human Services - \$6250
Dept of Immigration - \$1125
Dept of Foreign Affairs - \$80
Notary Public - \$165
International Couriers - \$160
Visas - \$255
Passports - \$200
Orphanage - \$2150
Consul Certificates - \$40
Flights - \$5600
Medicals - \$1500
Legalisation Kit - \$40
Court Fee - \$185
Miscellaneous - \$300
PLUS Baby Goods (pram, cot etc)
– up to \$2000

SUB TOTAL: \$2000 - \$6000
MINUS Maternity Allowance of \$3000
= TOTAL of \$0.00 - \$3000

TOTAL: \$20,050
MINUS \$0.00 Allowance
= TOTAL OF \$20,050.

Whilst the Maternity Allowance would make a small dent in the huge costs incurred to adoptive parents, it is the principle at stake here, and the discriminatory nature of the legislation that needs to be, and should be addressed. It could be reasoned from the above figures that the government is prepared to refund 50 – 100% of the costs involved in having a baby naturally, as well as substantial subsidies via Medicare and the private health system. In contrast, no assistance whatsoever is available to those who have struggled for years to start a family, and yet are prepared to do the most admirable, emotional, and financially taxing task of offering an overseas child, usually in desperate need, a loving home. Surely this anomaly should be addressed, giving some recognition to the struggle of adoptive families.

We strongly recommend that the age limit of 26 weeks be removed, so that there is no discrimination whatsoever against overseas adoptive families. We further recommend that there be *no later* age limit applied to the Maternity Allowance, as many families receive allocations of older children, and their costs for preparation for that child coming

into their family are no different from those for a biological child. (i.e. the adoptive family still requires a cot/bed, pram, car seat, time off work etc for which the Maternity Allowance was designed to assist). We feel that as adoptive parents, we are entitled to at least the same benefits as other parents.

Because of the substantial *extra* costs involved in overseas adoption, we ask the government to consider tax deductibility or a rebate system to *further* assist adoptive families, as happens in other countries such as USA. As there are relatively few overseas adoptions in Australia, this would not be a huge expense for the government, but would promote a notion of encouragement, recognition and support for adoptive families individually, and the adoptive community as a whole. Bearing in mind the available research/evidence that suggests overseas adopted children do better with a sibling of the same or also adopted background, many parents aspire to or attempt to adopt again, often making substantial sacrifices to do so. It would be most gratifying if any government assistance resulting from recommendations from this inquiry, were applied retrospectively to the adoption of the couples' first child. With the low fertility rate currently a major concern to Australia's future, and with the government's recent call to have an extra child for posterity, we, who form our families through adoption, can do our bit to stem this unfortunate situation. In fact, with supportive and generous government assistance, the adoption of children from overseas could be a significant alternative to immigration, creating a myriad of ongoing child related employment and services. This would go some way to overcoming our low fertility rate, as well as providing a larger future workforce to counter the specific needs of our increasing ageing population.

We are also aware of the lack of support available to adoptive parents in regard to paid maternity and adoption leave. This too is discriminatory against adoptive parents, where, in all states, one parent is required to be available full time to care for their adopted child for up to a year after placement. Being a minority group, it appears that there is often no / limited / unequal provision for leave for an adoptive parent when a child comes into their care. We encourage the government to address this issue so as to remove the present hardship of adoptive parents.

We hope this submission is helpful to your inquiry, and we encourage you in all your efforts.

[REDACTED]